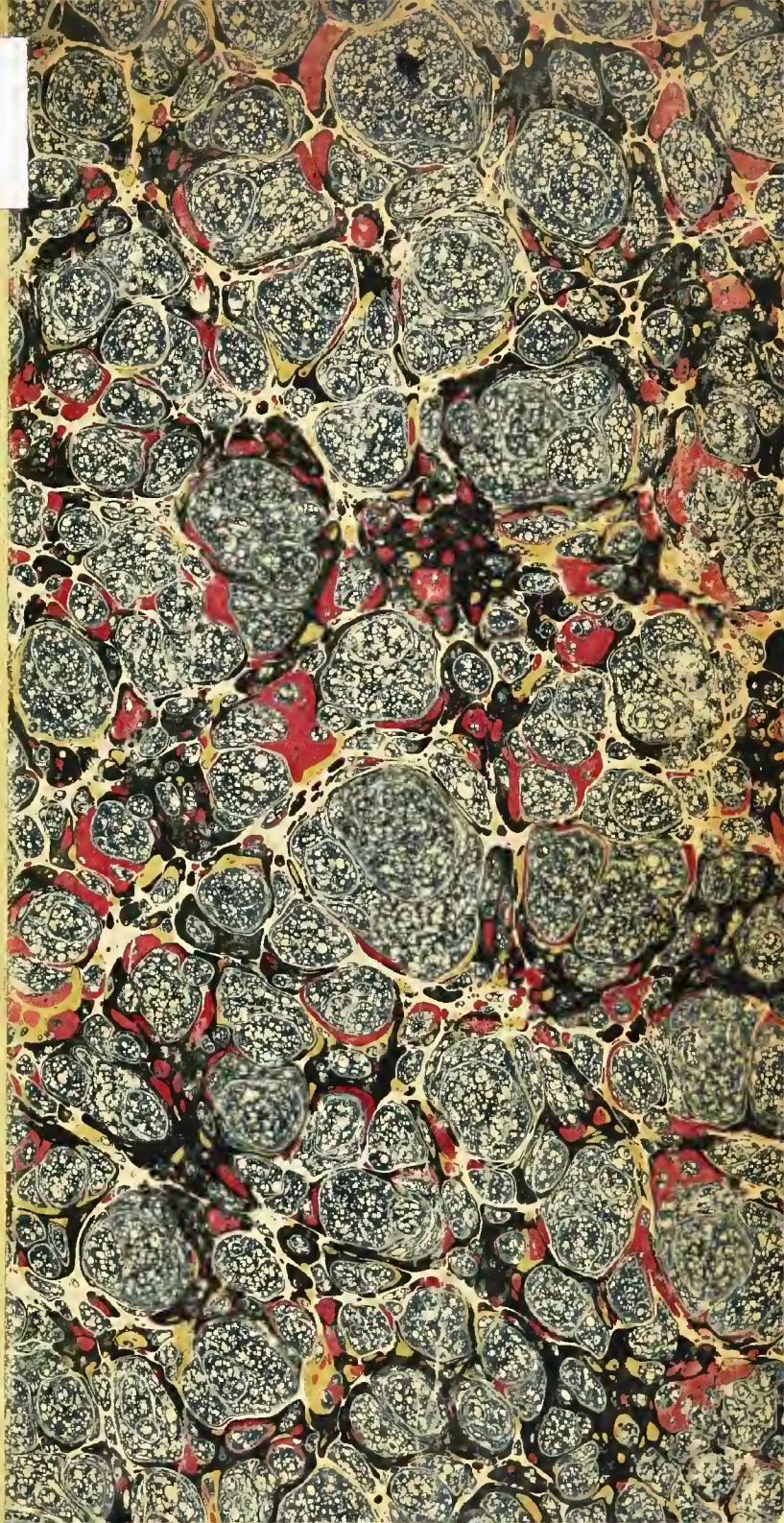


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# THE CAUSES

OF THE

# DECLINE OF THE ROMAN COMMONWEALTH

The Arnold Prize Essay for 1887

BY

HERBERT W. BLUNT, B.A.

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## THE CAUSES OF THE DECLINE OF THE ROMAN COMMONWEALTH.

THE fall or decline of a body politic, as it has often been pointed out, is solely the result of its own defects; and violence, to be truly successful, must be only the outward expression of internal mischief. Save under this condition, victory in reality rests with the vanquished even in their hour of defeat,—with the Gallo-Roman, for example, in France, and in Norman England with the Saxon. Though the statement is doubtless a commonplace, the fact is of the highest importance; and specially so where, as in the case of Republican Rome, the proximate cause of downfall is a genius such as that of Gaius Julius, supplemented by the only less original talent of Octavian, and where accordingly causes of revolution less personal, and therefore more radical, are only too easily overlooked. We are too apt to forget that that imperialism in which republican ideas found their euthanasia was not in any true sense the destroyer, and that Pharsalus, Thapsus and Munda, Philippi and Actium were in fact battles fought over a dead Commonwealth. We stand in need of the reminder that the history of the decline of the elder Rome is a study in pathology.

But in thus limiting the inquiry we have really accomplished very little. ‘Death from natural causes’ is a large verdict which can never satisfy science. The autopsy, too, of a political organism is a process which has no perfect parallel in the details of the dissecting-room. Diagnosis indeed is easy; for the symptoms of governmental paralysis, and of the derangement of economic and social functions, are in general but too obvious in discontent, lawlessness, and destructive agitation. But the problems which rise next in order are far more complex than in the case of the individual.

The reasons for this are plain. Subjects for demonstration are rare and seldom presented in their entirety. Experimentation is impossible, and the inductions made from necessarily incomplete historical records are of very uncertain application to any particular case. Causes are never simple and hardly ever merely composite. And finally, reciprocal causation often makes the discovery of separate efficient impossible, and confines investigation to very special combinations. In truth the data are neither fully adequate nor indepen-



dent. Such drawbacks, which show in some sort the limitations of any political subject, are very apparent in the case of Republican Rome.

And yet the analogy of vital organisation is most pertinent and most helpful. It directs our attention to the more essential points; hints at congenital defects of constitution, at imperfect adaptation to a changing environment, at the results of strain and of excess, at irregularities of diet and assimilation—in fine, at any and every error in the nature or the nurture of the Roman state which can possibly have proved fatal.

Following then the lead of physical analogies, we propose to ask whether there was any fatal imperfection in the nature of the Commonwealth which must have infallibly led to its decline, and we shall endeavour to show that its constitution was all but irretrievably defective, and cure hardly conceivable. We shall proceed to inquire whether the environment and history of the Republic—her external circumstances—were not of a kind to precipitate rather than to arrest disease, and whether things political and social and, above all, facts economic, did not accentuate the decadence; while, finally, we shall attempt to make it manifest that there was no power in the Commonwealth able and willing to regenerate it and to save it, that its death was a necessary condition of its resurrection in a modified and changed form.

We would not raise the question whether the empire was the youth or the old age of Rome. We would leave as it stands the controversy as to the possibility of an earthly immortality for nations<sup>1</sup>. We would wish, however, to demonstrate that the Roman constitution was in its essential nature wholly unworkable; that remedies were at the first not applied and from an early date even inapplicable; that Rome's extended suzerainty, howsoever acquired, hastened, though it did not originate, her decline; while economic causes co-operated with constitutional, if they co-operated only. Primarily the cause of downfall was the normal development of the Roman Constitution.

The Roman Constitution is of course not to be described in its length and breadth and height, within the narrow limits of this essay. But its main defects are not hard to define. It was not a rigid constitution, still less a flexible one; and, with the faults of both, it possessed the advantages of neither. It progressed, but always and necessarily in the direction of utter incompetence. It failed to progress, but its stereotyping was always of a false tendency. Its liberalism was inefficient or harmful, even when sincere. Its conservatism was fraught with perhaps even greater danger. It is the standing monument in history of logical inconsistency, unredeemed by practical efficiency.

These allegations we shall proceed to make good. 'As long,' says Mommsen, 'as there was a Roman community, in spite of changes of form, its settled principles were:—that the magistrate had absolute

<sup>1</sup> On one solution of which depend Lucan's primary causes of Rome's decline: *Invidia fatorum series summisque negatum Stare diu. Phars. I. 70. 1. In se magna ruunt. Ib. I. 81.*



command; that the council of elders was the highest authority in the state; and that every exceptional resolution required the sanction of the sovereign, or, in other words, of the community of the people<sup>1</sup>. The constitution was, as Sallust puts it, *imperium legitimum*<sup>2</sup>, a contradiction in terms, a congeries of anomalies.

How then did the Republic for nearly 500 years preserve her constitution? Simply by shelving it. The magistrate was autocratic, but hedged in with such restrictions that he in general ignored his great position and was content to act as a vestry-clerk. The senate had no *potestas*, but, through the magistracy, secured much *potentia*. And the sovereign-people,—really sovereign in Rome, on the Austinian theory or any other—being incapable and moreover good-natured, shut its eyes and ignored speculative politics. Every factor in the government enjoyed either more or less than its constitutional rights; never those rights themselves. No factor in the state renounced its rights; conservatism barred the way. No factor performed its duties; liberalism obstructed. And the natural consequence was that when a time of strain came, there came also an era of factious legislation, which upset all things constitutional, save and except the pernicious customs and charters on which the three orders based their incompatible rights.

The machinery broke down like the constitutional systems of Poland and of the Holy Roman Empire. The constitution proved to be 'constituted anarchy'; its elements were all so absolute as to be out of relation one to another; and abstract freedom from limitations is concrete amorphism. To borrow a metaphor, the branches of the tree were severed, and, when in complete disjunction from their common life, had only rottenness before them.

The main theory of Roman government was false. A vestry where the chairman decides absolutely, and where the members of the vestry have absolute authority, and, moreover, are appointed by some method which is neither nomination by the chairman nor election by the rate-payers, nor anything which will in any way bring them into harmony with chairman or parish, represents with some fidelity this republican system. But this is not all; there are the ratepayers to be reckoned with, who also have an absolute voice in the policy of the board. They elect the chairman, but they elect him on the nomination of his predecessor, who may refuse or accept candidates apparently at his own sweet will. Further, there is not one chairman only, but at least two; each with a power, more or less under control of custom and tradition it is true, but still absolute. And finally the negative of any chairman is more powerful than the affirmative of a colleague. There is no mutual responsibility, and no common action, and accordingly there is no policy in the stricter sense. And, alas! no higher power from without can come down upon the vestry and compel it to reform itself, for this paradoxical board rules the whole known world.

<sup>1</sup> Hist. Rom. (Eng. Trans., Popular Edition) i. cap. 5. vol. I. p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> Sall. Cat. 6.

That all this is no mere extravagance may be easily shown from the facts. Take, for example, the procedure of legislation. Apart from the curiate assembly, which, except as an instrument of obstruction to measures not purely legislative, was, before Rome attained her highest prosperity, a mere formal survival, there were three powers to be reckoned with—magistrate, senate and people; the last in its centuries, or in its tribes according to certain traditional regulations apparently based on the nature of the bills in question<sup>1</sup>. Legislation proper was in its substance vested conjointly in the senate (or rather in the magistrate in council) and in the people. How then did each factor in government bear its part in legislation?

In practice, though not in theory, every bill was first submitted to the senate. A bill could only be introduced by a magistrate, for the senate was a council of advice merely, and could not originate. But suppose it submitted; it was discussed, of right, by the *princeps senatus* and the principal magistrates, and, of privilege, by such other senators as the presiding magistrate thought fit to call on for an opinion, and so to distinguish from the *pedarii* or silent members. Amendments might be directly proposed by the speakers, and irrelevant views on general politics ventilated. The bill itself might be dropped by its proposer, or he might constitute any of the *sententiae* offered a substantive motion. If the meeting were not adjourned by the approach of night, and the motion escaped the veto of the tribunes of the commons or the arbitrary discretion of the president, it might proceed to a division formal or informal, and if adopted by *discessio* or otherwise, it attained, if stopped, the extra-legal position of a *senatus auctoritas*<sup>2</sup>, or, if not stopped by *intercessio*, became something analogous to a Greek *προβούλευμα*, a *senatus consultum* which, if it concerned matters of mere temporary administration, was law, provided that a magistrate would and could enforce it<sup>3</sup>. If, however, the bill dealt with constitutional and not administrative questions, it was referred to the people.

It was 'promulgated'—exposed for a legal *trinundinum* to public criticism, and then referred to the *comitia* where it was introduced by a magistrate. If the comitial meeting was not prevented by the *spectio*<sup>4</sup> of some higher magistrate who volunteered *de caelo servare* and so by a religious fraud postponed the assembly *sine die*—and *dies comitiales* were few and far between—if possible a vote was taken. If possible: for the auspices might be unfavourable, the weather report ominous, some one might fall with epilepsy, or a preceding

<sup>1</sup> The distinction of *populi comitia tributa* and *plebis comitia tributa* would appear untenable—(a) because the authority of a late jurist has no weight as against the inference from contemporary silence; (b) because Festus s. v. *populi scitum* may be held as a positive authority against the distinction; (c) because the use of *populi scitum* by writers under the empire (e. g. by Tac. Ann. III. 58) seems its normal one.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Cic. ad Fam. I. 2, a motion vetoed by C. Cato *tamen est perscripta*.

<sup>3</sup> E. g. the restriction on *liberae legationes*, passed *Cicerone cos.*, though only a *Senatus consultum*, was fully binding.

<sup>4</sup> *Bibulus' spectio* against Caesar and Sestius' proposal to carry on a permanent *spectio* are notorious.

*concio* might be prolonged till sunset, or a fraud might be perpetrated like that which saved Rabirius in 63 B.C. However, these dangers tided over, the *populus*, which had no representation, and, except in *conciones* dominated by an unenfranchised mob and dependent on a magistrate's will<sup>1</sup>, no discussion, might vote, *tributum* and not *virutum*, its simple *Uti rogas* or *Antiquo*, and still the bill was not safe.

For here too, before the results of the voting were declared, the interposition of a tribune sufficed not merely to suspend but to stop the motion. In fact the whole system was one of negation, and with such legislative machinery constitutional reform was naturally impossible. Not only had the old order a prescriptive and presumptive superiority; by its very weight it blocked reform-schemes. And uniformly Roman government worked on the block system.

Practically no doubt the senate could and did find a magistrate willing to make the *relationes* it desired, and to select for divisions such of its *sententiae* as were acceptable to the majority. It could further find magistrates to enforce its *consulta*, i.e. to make them law; for the magistrates were annual, and, even if not senatorian at heart, a magistrate knew that his future, when his year of office closed, was largely dependent on his harmonious co-operation with the senate. But, given a magistrate hostile to the senate, he could paralyse the supreme council throughout his political career. His edicts e.g. as praetor ran as law, when *Senatus consulta* which he refused to enforce did not run. His veto as tribune or his collegial intercession<sup>2</sup> stopped their action completely. Positively he could perhaps do little, for he had colleagues who might be won; but one negative countervailed many affirmatives. If others were absolute, so was he. The collective responsibility of a cabinet was as yet unevolved, and the magistracy was anything but unitary. The system was in fact, as Niebuhr notes, not unlike that of Prussia before the rise of Hardenberg and Stein; and as the latter resulted in Auerstadt and Jena, so did the former in Pharsalus and Actium. For the senate, *de facio* supreme in legislation, was exposed to the negative of any tribune, a weapon secure, save in the face of national danger, to any party or any adventurer—an incongruity which might have wrecked a system stronger than the Roman.

The evolution indeed of the tribunate of the commons from the right of individual redress, and from the personal inviolability of the *leges sacrae* was a natural one and on the lines of general constitutional progress. If, too, plebeian consuls as leaders of opposition might exercise a constitutional veto,<sup>3</sup> why not extend this power? but once granted the tribunial power was looked upon as the Palladium of the people and could never be recalled.

Accordingly, in the interests of order as against liberty, crime and

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Cic. ad Att. IV. i. 6, *habui concionem; omnes magistratus . . . dederunt.*

<sup>2</sup> Collegial intercession was, however, extremely rare. *Spectio*, *Obnuntiatio* and purchased tribunial intercessions took its place. Yet, cf. the case of the coss. of 51 B.C., and for praetorian intercession cf. Cic. in Verr. I. 46.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Mommsen, *Hist. Rom.* II. cap. 2, vol. I. p. 286.

murder, bribery and treachery were employed, and the Gracchi and many after them, like some before them, perished in order to keep the state-machinery from deadlock. They fell martyrs not so much in the cause of great ideals as to the exigencies of government.

For the rest, the union of senate and magistracy during Rome's struggles for hegemony in Latium, and for existence first and then empire against Carthage, enabled the government to go on. The political *fainéance* of the people, in its changing senses, during the great wars of Rome, the financial supervision exercised by the senate, and the impossibility of carrying on prolonged foreign wars without an organised bureau for foreign affairs, such as was the senate, humbled the fuglemen of the political sovereign, and they in many cases took the pay of the nobility and did the senate yeoman's service<sup>1</sup>. The marked incapacity, too, of the popular favourites—of C. Flaminius at the Thrasymene lake and of M. Varro at Cannae—helped to make the senate *de facto* a strong oligarchy. It was the old houses, the Fabii and the Scipiones, that made Rome's prosperity. It was that Flaminius who had ignored the senate and appealed directly to the tribes in 232 B. C., who failed ignominiously against the foe over whom the aristocratic victors of Metaurus and Zama prevailed. And the precedent accordingly of Flaminius' home-policy was not followed till the days of Ti. Gracchus. The fact however remains, that it was always open for your Ti. Gracchus or other socialist agitator to follow in a track along which the Lex Hortensia gave a right of way.

No reform was carried, for none seemed necessary, when the *de facto* sovereign could rule quietly. Men forgot to give the senate a voice which could make itself heard, a power of self-movement. It was not an ἀρχή κινήσεως, and accordingly, the *de jure* sovereign was able, when it arose in its might, to convulse the Republic with the struggle of *popolani* and *nobili*.

The family-policy, too, of the conqueror of Zama, and again of the Metelli, hastened the end; but, unless the senate should abdicate, or occupy an unassailed throne, that end was clearly foreshadowed. The 'Venetian Government' of *le cabinet intérieur*, which existed in England just before the American War of Independence, was, by the nature of the case, bound to destroy the House of Commons or to perish; and it perished. But the House of Commons was organised and had an administrative past; and so there was something to take the place of the Bute Cabal. In Rome there was nothing to supersede the senate, save the ascendancy of individuals—of Ti. Gracchus, of his brother, of Marius, of Saturninus, of Cinna; possibly of Sulpicius, of Lepidus, or of Catilina; lastly of Pompeius or of Caesar, and of Antonius or of Octavian.

So much for Senatorian government in its main department—legislation. Its only hope was in some dictator who should make

<sup>1</sup> *Viam unam dissoluendae tribuniciae potestatis per collegarum intercessionem*, Liv. IV. 48.

it sovereign in very truth, and him it could scarcely have found except perhaps in Camillus, Rome's Scharnhorst rather than her Stein. The man was not to be found later. Scipio Aemilianus gave most promise and he died. Sulla was too late. Others had not the power, or not the patriotism, or not the inspiration. Dictators were viewed with jealousy. The decemviral legislation was too early to substitute code for veto, and was moreover wrecked on the misconduct of its members. The only hope of senatorian government was a Sulla before Sulla, a man to limit the magistracy, to abolish the tribunate, to swamp the *comitia*, to give strength and articulation to the senate, and all this without an overweening personal ambition.

Sulla, it is said, left the tribunate *imaginem sine re*<sup>1</sup>. That measure alone might in earlier days have saved Rome. But the time had gone by; the imperial period had come, and the economic ills of the ill-nucleated commons were drawing to a culmination. There was an *ordo equester* which in its shortsightedness preferred misrule and a capitalistic Saturnalia to a strong government. There were pro-consuls who in the provinces had got beyond senatorian control. There was the army, too, of Marius—the professional army of Napoleon, not the national militia of Camillus. And finally, the secret had been divulged, in part by Sulla himself, that, in the arbitration of Roman political controversies, ‘heaven was on the side of the big battalions.’ The senate then had no outlook save in the direction of a Caesar and his fortunes; in the ascendancy of a master, not a minister.

But if the possibility of a prolonged senatorian government was conditioned by the chances of an all but impossible reformation, what hope was there elsewhere? Popular government in Rome had, if feasible, much to recommend it, both as the restoration of a *de jure* sovereign, and as an advance in the direction in which the splendid hopes of liberalism have always looked for their realisation. But was it ever possible? The answer is, necessarily, No.

Consider the elections, as conducted, say, in the second century B.C. They represented very largely the powers and the possibilities of the commons, and to what did they amount? There was no election to the legislature, save in so far as the magistrates were called to the senate, during and after their year of office. The summons until the time of Sulla, when concession was too late, rested with an officer appointed by the curies, or, practically, and at last even nominally, by the senate. The legislature, except accidentally, showed no concession to the principle of representation even in a rudimentary form. Proposals for a representative senate after Cannae were rejected, and perhaps rightly, but at any rate the senate gave no ground of hope to the sovereign people.

And there were no elections to the Judicature, save in the single instance of Silvanus' reconstruction of the Varian commission in B.C. 89. The *populus* had no interest in the *judicia* except through the

<sup>1</sup> Velleius II. 30.

praetors themselves. *Judices* were selected, principally from the senate and the equestrian order, in proportions varying according to statutes passed in the interests of one or other, while the *tribuni aerarii*, whether they were 'district or ward presidents'<sup>1</sup> or 'men of the census originally requisite for the office of military pay-masters'<sup>2</sup>, were, even supposing their popular character to be beyond dispute, of too late a date (B. C. 70) to subserve any popular pretensions.

There remain, then, only the magisterial elections. In how far were these calculated to render the popular cause effective, and how far did they promise well for a democratic reformation? Little, if at all. In theory, if not otherwise, the *populus* was regarded as the sole creator of the permanent executive, but this availed nothing. Of the censors we have spoken. Of the consuls, praetors, quaestors, aediles and tribunes, we can only say that their popular character was in the best days of Rome delusive, and, in the decline, even fatal.

It was in the best days delusive, for in the senate's day of power the magistrate, the minister of that council, actually designated his successor. The substantial vote of the *populus* was accounted only a *congé d'élire*. Nominations were rejected. The majority-candidate was in certain cases, *e.g.* in that of Marcellus after Cannae, completely ignored. Nay, so far did the theory go, that the legal position of Cinna<sup>3</sup>, when from 87-4 B. C. he designated himself and his colleagues without comitial ratification, was unassailed and unassailable. Under the king at the dawn of Roman history, or under the Empire later, such procedure was natural. In the republican period it was artificial, grotesque, anomalous. This theory made the task of the masters of the state easy, and the constitution of the principate was determined by it. But it made the pretensions of the *populus* to real government ridiculous.

Nor did the tribal organisation and the plebeian tribunate, by giving solidarity and definite articulation to the popular movement, fit the commons for a ready evolution when their hour should come. Tribal organisation, whether for elections or for general political purposes, was local. The *tribules* varied in number throughout the tribes. The number of *tribules* from any one tribe present at any one time in the *comitium* varied still more. Rome had outgrown primary assemblies before she reached her zenith; country-tribes were carried by packing, and city-tribes by caucuses, *sodalitates*, or the *operae* of a party-bravo. The respectable rustic, when he existed, was too occupied to appear. The respectable townsman was overawed by the clubs and his vote was swamped. Country-members might and did appear to support the candidature of a *municipalis*, or to secure a favourite's recall from just exile, and no doubt there was an earlier equivalent to the *concursum Italiae* of Cicero's day; but in general an imported and subsidised clique, resident in Rome, carried the rural vote, and, at least as the decline advanced, a band of *libertini* the urban. The voters were the outcome of economic causes, and

<sup>1</sup> Mommsen.

<sup>2</sup> Madwig.

<sup>3</sup> Mommsen, *Rom. Hist.* iv. cap. 9. vol. III. p. 325.

perhaps not even representation and an education as parliamentary electors could have saved city and country from being swayed by a mob which was all that the worst foes of the *populus* alleged it to be. At any rate representation only appeared with the municipal system of the empire, and the tribal organisation seemed to demand that Rome should be a city pure and simple, or else the head of an imperial federation which admitted the representative principle. And both were impossible.

The tribunate, too, was a delusion. It stopped the machine, but could not put it in motion. It was a clog of formidable weight, but it was not a motive-force. The people became, from economic reasons, demoralised, and the possession of powers purely obstructive and not under due control still further demoralised them. They were harmed rather than helped by their protagonists.

Again, the centuries, which were nominal *populus* and theoretical sovereign were not, until the very end, completely emancipated from senatorian control. Even after the formal *εἰς-τὸ-δημοτικώτερον* remodelling<sup>1</sup> of 241 B.C., they were dominated by the wealthier classes. The tribes might be managed by agents; the centuries were managed by interests. Both decayed together.

The enfranchisement of Italy swamped both—the tribes directly, the centuries indirectly from the breakdown of their *raison d'être* in the citizen-army, which from a privilege became a burden, and from a burden a burden shared and diffused with an extension of rights which left the organisation hopeless. Sulla, accordingly, was right in leaving *populus* and *plebs* to their natural atrophy. Only in restriction within the *pomoerium*, or in representation throughout the empire was there any hope for popular government.

And when the elections were real and popular, they were fatal. While decent men stood aloof from politics, the mob elected adventurers. The elected sold themselves to the senate, from which alone they had a career to hope for; or they worked for private aims and earned a fortune or received a quietus; or they were sincere and set themselves in antagonism to the system, and the clumsy machine crushed them. Nor did the last benefit the state more than the first; for reform inevitably degenerated into open revolution—it was a disturbance of that very unstable equilibrium which alone made any government under the old constitution possible. Reform, from the popular side, unless it took forms which Roman antiquity never dreamed of, meant only the surrender of the state to the club-law of a mob more unreasoning than the Parisians of Robespierre; it destroyed the ascendancy of its Girondists, but it was to be convulsed by any *parti Thermidorien*, and, when the sword superseded the club, was to be mastered by its Napoleon.

What then were the possibilities of the *populares*? To legislate by plebiscites which senate and magistrate and army disallowed or overrode. To elect in farce, or to set up a traitor to his party, or, worst

<sup>1</sup> Dionys. IV. 21; Livy I. 43.



of all, to evoke a firebrand who found his logical policy in nihilism! To veto government-proposals through the tribunate, and to carry none of their own. To be dominated by a mob or a coterie; to follow adventurers; and to lose by every victory! And finally, to be dissolved by extension; to be swamped by the alien interests of the Italian townships; to lose their own self-respect; and to greet with acquiescence and perhaps satisfaction the destruction of their bauble sovereignty! The popular cause in Rome was barren or produced monstrosities.

The senatorian party was not unfruitful, but it found its fruits destroyed. It had not the powers it assumed and it failed to legalise them, or to indemnify itself for its usurpations. For a time it governed well; for it could govern, whereas the *populus* could not. But it reigned through purchased ministers and borrowed powers. Hence, when the *populus* attained political consciousness without political maturity, a terrible reckoning was exacted for *senatus consulta ultima*, and for martyred tribunes, for wars which in the interests of a mercantile aristocracy were slave-hunts, and for taxes which were violence and robbery. The machinery of the two *comitia* was rusty and impotent to produce, but it could work by Mamilian rogations and the like; it could try Rabirius and could banish Cicero. The government had always the awkward monster to reckon with, not as a *volonté générale*, but as a factor in the actual regulation of political detail. The *populares* destroyed the only strong republican government that Rome had or could have. The time for any efficient power to step in and demolish or transform at last came.

But what of the magistracy? and especially of the higher magistrates, consuls, praetors, censors? They had many advantages for forming a strong government. The consuls were a *collegium* with the absolute powers of the expelled kings, and the senatorian diet was their *concilium* and only their *concilium*. The *populus* was in practice dominated by the *nobiles* or *patres*, or, at the least, by the *conscripti*,—senators enrolled from the moneyed classes,—whose interests and whose power were in strict subservience to the council of state. What was there then, in theory, which prevented these magistrates, even in the very earliest times, from ruling Rome?

There were, in the first place, certain limitations. Their *imperium*, i.e. their supreme *potestas*, was *legitimum* or controlled by charter. The *appellatio* to the centuries or citizen-army, in matters of life and death, and dependence on the council (as *reipublicae custos*, or the permanent element in the constitution), were drawbacks, but perhaps salutary drawbacks to efficient autocracy. And beside these, there were graver checks and counterchecks. The executive was not, as is sometimes inaccurately stated, 'monarchy in commission,' for the consuls were co-equal and without the union of a common policy. They were not a committee or cabinet appointed to carry out a certain political programme. They were rather Ishmaels, fighting each for his own hand. They were two, and co-ordinate; a fatal number even on a rural commission of the peace. The negative of either was

sufficient to paralyse the positive efficiency of the other. The only practical solution therefore was a division of labour which left each less absolute. Not that there was anything approaching to a departmental system, for each was judge, general, and everything else. But, by a tacit agreement, one would take the war-department, the other the home-policy; only, always with the consciousness that his colleague might invade his sphere of public business, and, *e.g.*, establish a rival court of equity on the opposite side of the forum. It recalls irresistibly the Prussian system of foreign politics in 1806, with two ministers, one treating with France, the other with the Czar. In the early days, too, it was often open war between the two absolute monarchs. For a long time plebeian and patrician consuls were *ipso facto* deadly enemies. Hence arose the senatorian ascendancy and the triumphant policy of 260-167 B.C. The *populus* was many-headed and puzzle-headed; the magistrates were rivals, or were forced into rivalry; and the senate reigned.

There were also two further limitations to magisterial power, which from the first played into the hands of the senate. Firstly, the consulship was an annual office, and, for re-election, it was necessary to gain either the assembly or the senate; while, further, the continuity of a war-policy or a finance-scheme could only be secured by a relatively permanent bureau. In the senate, the policy of Rome was *tralatitia*. And, secondly, while absolute in the field, in Rome the consul laid aside an important part of his *imperium*, the *jus gladii*, and this restriction involved not only the appellate jurisdiction of the *populus*, but also the defencelessness of the magistrate. Only in the camp was a consul absolute; at home, his absolutism was tempered by his many dangers. Each consul enjoyed the position of the Junior Spartan King.

With the growth, too, of the senate's power, the *potestas* of the magistrate underwent further modifications. The veto of the tribunes was a concession to the popular party against the senate, but other restrictions came from the aristocratic side. A custom grew up of suing for each successive office at a certain age, with a practical prohibition of re-election within certain periods. The usage also obtained of recognising the eligibility, for the higher offices, of those only who had passed the lower. These traditions, though not consolidated into statute-law till the *lex annalis* of Tappulus (B.C. 180), were current long before, and controlled the magistracy, in the interests of the senate. An obnoxious magistrate found himself blocked at each of the lower stages. His candidature was rejected; his election vitiated; and so the senate vanquished him.

Again, the elections, since they had reference at once to civil and military office, were often determined to the senate's advantage by the exigencies of the time. The system which called Crassus from the woollack to take the field against Spartacus, while it obviously made the creation of a Tyrannis more easy, favoured, in general, senatorian ascendancy. A good soldier of the Moreau stamp would take the lead in time of war, and would be content to receive his

politics, cut and dried, from the council. A clever administrator of the Rewbel type would take the helm in times of peace, but would, if called upon to conduct a campaign, be only too glad to stand well with the powers that were, and to have his shortcomings condoned at home.

The magistrate, then, though, as king, superior to the other pieces on the board, was for the present harmless in aggression. His royal brother was his foe, and the pawns and higher authorities, though powerless if the kings refused to play, threatened a chronic check-mate. It was, to take another illustration, as pretty a state of deadlock as the famous scene in 'The Critic.'

But yet, in the consulship—for the censorship was, if first in dignity, inferior in power, and the remaining magistracies were but stepping-stones—there were signs of a great future. The *populus* had only *jura* without the power of political self-development. The senate, though organised, had only *auctoritas*, and was obliged to work through others—in fact through the magistrates; the consuls, on the other hand, were only limited, and their limitations were obvious and partial. If only circumstances favoured, limits might be transcended.

And circumstances did favour. Continuous wars made consuls more absolute, because more often in the field. The acquisitions of war made provincial governors necessary, and who so fitted as the ex-supreme magistrate? The whilom vestry-clerk or lord-justice or lord-mayor found himself now a pasha. He was still limited in time, for his tenure of power was for one year, and in space to his province, for in Rome he was only a civilian still. Moreover his army was civic. He had to wait years between his first and second opportunities. He was financed by the senate, checked by the *quaestiones*, and only really powerful among subjects.

How, then, to pass beyond the limits? The decay of the national army, due to economic causes, led to the formation of the cohortal army by Marius. The needs of the Jugurthine and Cimbric wars called for a relaxation of the *lex annalis*. The law was relaxed, and armies became the instruments of their leaders. The financial control of the senate was obviated by wholesale plundering—even by the plundering of Rome. The *quaestiones* dared not treat a proconsul militant as they treated a Rutilius. Armies moved from province to province, and the tenure of commands was prolonged indefinitely. A Strabo or a Sulla was absolute. Sulla legislated against the change, and made the senate, once in Roman history, a power as well as an authority; and the new constitution lasted twelve years. Then came the *imperium coordinatum aequum*, and finally the *imperium majus*, for long periods or for life; and the magistrate stood supreme and absolute, with his full *imperium*, in and out of Rome. The elder Rome had perished; the Rome of the Cæsars begun.

Surely the constitution of Rome was a paradox of the wildest kind. Magistrates circumscribed and shackled, and hampered each by the other, and yet the sole efficient power; without any collegiate or

continuous policy, and yet absolute! The council powerless, and yet *dominus publici consilii*; in diplomacy and finance, the only repository of tradition and experience, and yet unable to confer any plenary powers; unable to save a dictator from *εὐθυσί*, or to authorise a Cicero to put to death a rebel! And finally the *populus*, without political dynamic and acting only as the tool of adventurers and charlatans, and yet sovereign! with a programme aiming not at political possibilities, but at democratic ideals; always struggling to carry the outposts of officialism against the *nobiles*, and ever finding its position worse; scaling the heights of the consulship and censorship at infinite pains, and seeing its plebeian families ennobled, and forthwith solidarised with the old nobles into a new aristocracy of *optimates*, and these no longer legally assailable; and yet this, *Populus Romanus*, the people that won Latium, and Italy and the world!

The magistracy had before it the prospect of changed times, in which, untrammelled, it should vindicate its absolutism. The senate looked for an emancipator, who should be, at once, all-powerful and all-subservient, and who should make its *de facto* sovereignty real and its *auctoritas* articulate. And the *populus* looked to become a power in a city-state or by its representatives in an empire; the one ideal was in the past, and history rarely retrogresses; the other in the future, and nature never anticipates. It was natural that the magistracy should survive, for it was the fittest. But it survived transformed; and in the struggle for existence the republic declined and fell. From the nature of its constitution it was inevitable that Rome should cease to be a republic.

The share of external history in the decline is easy to trace, and need scarcely occupy us long. Decay was necessarily arrested by every struggle with foes without. In the struggle for life, in Italy, when Rome was still a city-state and the consuls went out to war, like sheriffs, at the head of the city-trainbands, the collective wisdom of the council of elders was of the greatest weight. Patriot leaders were necessary, in order to carry out the counsels of the senate; and, under the shadow of martial law, the people forgot their rights. And again, when Rome led more than one city in her train, the same exigencies prevailed; for Italy was the battle-ground, not only of states but of races. When, too, peace came with victory, and the burdens of the poor meant slavery, luckily sovereign proprietorship came too, and economic ills were for the time staved off; while, with sovereignty, came the practical separation of the colleagues at the head of affairs, with the vista of emancipation for each.

The senate seemed now likely to go to the wall, under the pressure of economic troubles deferred but not remedied, and of the masterful insubordination of magistrates, patrician and plebeian alike. But again and again the patriciate, which knew 'neither how to yield nor how to enforce' its prerogatives, transformed by the decimation of the curies into the most obnoxious of class-interests, was compelled by the senate to give way. The government covered their retreat, closed the ranks of the aristocratic party, healed its wounds and formed a

social stratum, from which alone officialism was to be recruited. Opposition magistrates became rare, and were crushed with Machiavellian energy. The senate's rule became efficient and bade fair to become permanent, when in the midst of prosperity, in the lull that preceded the Punic wars, the pride and selfishness of the caste of *optimates* seemed likely to bring down the aristocratic power, and for ever.

The state was exposed, on a sudden, to a critical movement, such as has often destroyed even strong oligarchies. *Novi homines* had almost established a *δυναστεία* on the ruins of the senate, when fortune saved the curia, and perhaps the republic. Fortune takes strange shapes, and, in this case, it appeared in the shape of internecine war for commercial primacy in the Mediterranean. The power that threatened Rome was Carthage, a power constitutionally as impotent as Rome; and the struggle revived senatorian prestige. A first war passed off successfully, and the result was a new care and a new possession in Sicily. A second war ensued, and one which, but for the senate, must have ended fatally. The second Punic war was one of those struggles in which personal genius confronts national power, and only the diplomatic ability and resolute demeanour of the senate, and the unwearying patriotism of the senatorian champions, prevented Hannibal from crushing Italy, as Napoleon did Germany. But where a Flaminius, a Varro, and a Minucius failed, a Paullus, a Fabius, a Nero and a Scipio justified the senate's confidence, and carried out the senate's policy, and, at Zama, Rome conquered, and the two Spains were added to her empire. The political ideal at that time was senatorian rule, by means of ministers of state. Economic and social grievances were hushed, and the voice of the tribunes was seldom heard. The Scipiones, not men of original genius, but men of administrative talents, carried out, in numerous family-consulships, the senate's will. No one thought of reform, for, when all were agreed, what need to abolish the effete and shelved constitution? This absence of reform and of party measures, as distinct from personal impeachments, is the leading feature of Rome's constitutional history from Zama to Pydna.

But political shortsightedness was to find its punishment in the revival of constitutionalism, and in the awakening of the dormant *populus* and its sovereignty. Ti. Gracchus, in his renewal of the full powers of the tribunate, and in his revival of long obsolete land-legislation, was to show the senate, that its fancied security was not safety. The burning question of the day, however, was not, for the present, reform, but the vexed problem of nationalism as against imperialism. Was Rome to be the head of an Italian nation, with a protectorate in Sicily and the Spains, or was she to aim at world-empire?

To this question the answer of the senate, and of the hereditary officials of the Scipionic circle, was, that Nationalism was Rome's truest policy. And rightly so; but the answer of circumstances was Imperialism. The importance of the solution rested in this: the vestry or corporation could not undertake empire, for empire involved

at once the emancipation of the magistracy and the dissolution of the *populus*; i.e. the great rival of the senate in the constitution would be unchained, and the only countervail would be destroyed. This is, in substance, the reason why the judgment of the Scipionic coterie, of which, in the next generation, Polybius is the exponent, was radically right; that Rome must remain *urbs Roma*, a city-state, mistress of Italy, with an extended protectorate, but not an empire. For only thus could the senatorian government subsist. History falsified the hopes of the party, while it justified their decision. In the mouth of Cicero the catchword *imperium civile* is claptrap and an anachronism, for then the possibility of a government so confined that magisterial ambition could form no dreams, so large that a popular mass-meeting would be bewildered, was no longer a question of practical politics. The third Punic war had settled the question for ever.

And so we return from our digression. In the third war with Carthage new provinces were added. Wars in Greece augmented the empire further, and then in rapid succession state after state fell in, and the Roman Republic ruled the world. But the struggle exhausted her. Her depopulation bade fair to prove fatal. Italy, therefore, became, more and more, the recruiting-ground of Rome, and the sharers of her conquests claimed to share her power. This was one of the planks in Gaius Gracchus' platform—Italian franchise. And if he knew what he meant, or if he meant representation of the *municipia*, he was right; but he failed. Then came the breakdown of government, under the combined influence of economic troubles at home and provincial mismanagement abroad, and Marius, called to the head of Rome's army, found it necessary to make concessions. But more was demanded; and there ensued the Social war, which resulted in the enfranchisement of Italy. And the enfranchisement was such as to disorganise the *populus* without strengthening it. Now was the senate's opportunity; but the senatorian government, too, was disorganised. Marius had forced his way to the top in opposition to the family officialism of the Metelli, and had, in rising, shown the weakness of the senatorian party. And the reasons for Marius' ascendancy had shown that the *optimates* had not the justification of good management. In fact, the official-class had *in provincia* consoled themselves for restrictions in Rome. Misrule, and consequent disaster; wars provoked by Rome, and made dangerous by Roman poltroonery and corruption;—all this showed the inefficiency of the central bureau; while all its prestige had fallen with the elevation, by Gaius Gracchus, of the *ordo equester*, the most mischievous class to entrust with political power.

Accordingly the civil war followed, and if, at its close, Sulla for a moment revived the declining power of the senate,—and with the senate republican government must stand or fall,—yet the death of the dictator was the death-sentence of the commonwealth. No *concordia ordinum* such as was Cicero's policy, no confession of faith to the effect that office was nominally his, but really theirs, could save the state; for the time for the toga had gone by. The Marian

army had been levied; the proconsulars had broken loose; and no respect to *jus* or *auctoritas* remained. The watchword of the future was *Imperium*; 'Republican Rome conquered the civilized world, but kept it only by ceasing to be a republic'<sup>1</sup>.

'It would be easy,' says Hume, in his essay 'Of Refinement in the Arts,' 'to prove that writers mistook the causes of the disorders in the Roman state, and ascribed to luxury and the arts what really proceeded from an ill-modelled government and the unlimited extent of conquests.' To the empire, for which the main problems were depopulation and the gold-shrinkage, Hume's words do not apply, but of the republic they are doubtless true. And the more essential part of the review, 'ill-modelled government,' we have described. We have narrated too, in part, how conquest modified and dissipated the civic ideal of the commonwealth,—*οὐ γὰρ ἐκ δέκα μυριάδων πόλις ἔτι ἐστίν*<sup>2</sup>.

Have we, however, done enough to demonstrate the utter hopelessness of the position? Surely we have as yet only touched on the complex economic evils which acted on, and were reacted upon by, constitutional deficiencies; and we have as yet only told the story of Rome's extended acquisitions without in any way proving their necessity. To proceed, then. Of these two points the latter, perhaps, should take precedence, as more immediately the determinant of constitutional tendencies, and as earlier, historically, in reaching its culmination. The former, too, will fall more directly into its place in connexion with that demoralisation of Roman society which was the beginning of the end. Without further justification, then, we go on to treat of the natural character of Imperialism, as the outcome of Roman history.

Rome starts in history as a city-state, rather commercial than militant. We are not concerned to disentangle its *origines* from the complexus of myths with which they are ravelled, but we seem to see vaguely that it is as an emporium for Latium that Rome first becomes important. Now for a commercial city there is, especially in its infancy, the greatest danger from competitors; and unless it be beyond the reach of competition, as was Corinth, it must perforce become military. Athens and Aegina fought to the death, and Rome had like deadly struggles. To preserve her trade, then, she became other than a trader. She was fortunate to begin with. The Tuscan power, which decimated her curies in many a campaign, and which forced the burgesses to extend their burdens and rights to the centuriate army and assembly, and which for a time established a suzerainty over the little Roman community (*λήμη τῆς Τυρρηνίας*), luckily dwindled and decayed before the Phoenicians, and left inland commerce to Latium. The Latin cities yielded to Rome, and in the interests of her commercial hegemony a military supremacy was evolved.

And Italy was left alone in the struggle. The Phoenicians of Carthage had, after the decline of Etruria, to struggle with the Western Greeks; and, before the great battle began, Rome had unconsciously

<sup>1</sup> Froude, *Oceana*, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Arist. Nic. Eth. IX. 10.



become strong. The Gaul, the Italian races, the Greeks of the South felt Roman ascendancy. The Samnites and Pyrrhus fought an irreconcilable struggle for life against Rome, and the survivor, like the Polynesian cannibal, appeared to gain the strength of the rivals devoured. In her worst early struggles Rome was left unassailed by the strong nations. The Sicilian tyrants looked to Africa for their foe, Alexander of Macedon to Asia; while Punic jealousy saw in the Greeks—old rivals of Tyre in the Aegean—the real pretenders to primacy in the Mediterranean. Pyrrhus was but an adventurer, as Brennus had been but a barbarian; and the result of the isolation of the Italian war-drama was, that Rome became a city at the head of a nation—a metropolis which was the focus of all Italy. Economic troubles at home promoted colonisation; Italy was conquered by the plough as well as by the sword. It became inevitable that Rome should lead Italy, and direct Italian policy. She might be protectress, or suzerain in name; she was certainly supreme in reality.

Not that Rome only fought on the defensive. She provoked many wars, but the first *casus belli* was usually, nay almost always, from the adversary. Once Roman jealousy or pride was engaged in a conflict, war on any pretext for any quarrel ensued, and lasted till Rome triumphed. It was not as in Greece, where Athens might lead for half a century, fall, and again from time to time take the lead till the absolute enslavement of her country, or where Sparta might exercise an hegemony before and after, and all but efface herself in the intervals. It was necessary that Rome should conquer or perish. The temper of her people was of such a metal that, when involved in war, they exhausted themselves in their effort, and could only yield when dead or dying. Hence they often received the submission of foes, less distressed and straitened than themselves; and hence they never made a disadvantageous peace,—for they could only do so when the treaty should mean nothing more than an armistice between the living and the dead.

Rome then became necessarily the powerful sovereign of Italy, and that in isolation from the interests of Eastern and Southern powers. The war with Pyrrhus, however, brought Roman arms southwards. Roman commerce, too, guided Roman aims southwards. Italy appeared incomplete and unsafe without Sicily: and in Sicily Rome was brought face to face with Carthage.

The issue between Rome and Carthage was simply this: Etruria has passed away; Tyre and Sidon are decayed; Egypt is not maritime or commercial; Greece, formerly terrible, is contracting towards her centre, and dying in her extremities; Carthage and Rome alone remain to dominate trade in the Mediterranean. Which is to have all the profit and prestige of the commerce of the known world?

And there seems to have been but one answer. Carthage had reached the stage at which Rome is seen later, just before the Jugurthine war. Her armies were composed of *socii*, or semi-mercenaries, and, in many cases, of actual mercenaries. Her council and *suffetes* were as inefficient as senate and consuls after the Gracchan

disasters; her people were, if possible, less a factor in politics than the Roman.

Rome was just verging on such maturity as her constitution admitted of. Carthage was already on the decline, and the result was, of course, the victory of maturity over decay. Had Jugurtha been a Hannibal, or Hannibal appeared in the days of Scaurus and Albinus, i.e. just before the reforms and ascendancy of Marius, the event might have been otherwise. But that is to say: had Abdelkader been Napoleon —. As affairs stood, Rome conquered; and the consequence was, the undertaking of the interim-administration of each several province which Carthage evacuated in her retreat upon her bases, of Sicily and Spain; and Spain had to be maintained from the second to the third Punic war, lest a new Hannibal should renew the dangerous struggle. Eastward, too, arose troubles calling for interference. Rome, partly as the recipient of Carthage's reluctant concessions *inter vivos*, partly as the heir to fallen Carthage's extensive empire, became, as it were, without intending it, an imperial power. In the same half-conscious dream she seemed hurried into Greek acquisitions, and she awoke to find herself queen of the Mediterranean nations.

Imperialism was now a necessity. To lay down empire was *ut altum dormiret*, to court the sleep of death. How then this necessary imperialism—this iron crown which the commonwealth could not resign nor yet maintain—determined the destinies of Rome, has been shown. Rome had not the political genius of Athens for her *populus* to be successful in ruling her empire, nor had she the idea of the city-state ingrain in her very life that she should be able in strict civicism to carry out Aristotelian theory to the letter. Nor was Rome Venice in her glory, to allow the commercial ideals of a mediaeval aristocracy to guide and control her policy; for Rome's position was rather determined by circumstance, and Rome had to reckon with her constitution, which had not the effectiveness of the Venetian, even for a petty Venetian administration. Rome was Rome, and accordingly extended conquest resulted in the utter downfall of senatorian usurpation and in the disintegration of even that little jurisdiction which rested with the *populus*, while the magistrate remained to assert himself uncontrolled, and the empire was formed, the principate constituted from the *dissecta membra* of the republic. Hence, too, because of the natural evolution of the empire from the chaos of the revolution, the autocracy was apparently 'a bundle of old offices,' 'César gouverna d'abord sous des titres de magistrature<sup>1</sup>;' 'Auguste voulut cacher une puissance nouvelle sous des noms connu et des dignités ordinaires<sup>2</sup>,' and succeeded.

But the success would have been of a very different kind but for the co-operation of causes which may be classed as politico-economic, i.e. as concerned with 'la bonne administration de la maison commune' on the social side. For something else contributed to the

<sup>1</sup> Montesquieu.

<sup>2</sup> St. Évremond.

making and expansion of Rome, besides her original constitution, and her struggle for life. Without, indeed, the constant mooted questions as to land-laws, and poor-laws, and population-policy and the like, the progress of Caesarism is unthinkable. To mention one essential point only, in which the modification of constitutional tendencies is marked, the army of the revolution was created by economic rather than by political decadence. In the shaping of history, then, economics and politics go hand and hand; and to economic elements in Roman maladministration we naturally next turn.

Economic disaster was, if possible, more inevitable than political; for the constitution was, though organic, in some senses an artificially constructed state-machinery—a growth, indeed, and yet a creation; while the economy of the state was absolutely organic. The one might have been conceivably refitted, the other had to be reorganised. Vitality was necessary to both, but less to the political than to the economical, for the government was in one aspect an *ὄργανον*, in which mainspring, and cogwheels, and friction and adjustment were objects of attention. The social life of the nation involved rather questions of assimilation and growth and parasitism. But its *τάξις* was the original idea of the state, and, organic or not, parasitism was not a primary element in its life. To the *πολίτεια* then politics are of first, economics of secondary importance; the first are its nature, the second are of its nurture. And yet the normal effect of an imported virus is to kill. We shall expect to find then that economic dangers tended in the same direction as political difficulties.

Rome, we must bear in mind, rose and fell in a pre-economic age. ‘Happy,’ says Macintosh, ‘is the nation that has no political philosophy,’ but the position is only clear when we understand by it, ‘happy is the state that has never felt the need of scientific solutions to social problems, because it feels no pressure.’ It was fatal to Rome that she could not anticipate history and apply later science to contemporary evils. Her errors were, for her, irretrievable. Her reforms were empirical and superficial. Her reformers were often her deadliest foes. In a word, a false *Staatswirtschaft* was antecedently her natural destiny.

At first, as we should expect, no social question as distinct from politics appeared in Rome. The infant city under its kings might agitate the questions how far the senate ought to be attended to, how far the curies ought to have a voice in matters of state, and the like; but the king, the only real magistrate, called his own senate, and it was his instrument, not his rival; he had in the senate the means of a majority among the burgesses; he was limited by his own charters, but the fatal constitution had not appeared, and he governed, like our mediaeval kings, without a thought of an economic revolution. He felt political, he did not appreciate economic tendencies. The decimation of the burgesses in war might lead him to the first revolution, which constituted the centuriate army, but even depopulation needed no population policy. There was folkland or bookland enough for all. Rome’s griefs had not begun, and ‘every rood of land main-

tained its man.' But in after times the *quies secunda* of these days was looked upon as a far back golden age. The revolution came. The landless *plebei*, who formed the bulk of the town populace, began to grow, and to receive grants of folkland, such as placed them on a level with the lower classes of the popular army. The war necessities of the state solved the first land-question of Rome by introducing a free policy of distribution, which gave rights in exchange for burdens. And the military successes of the republic in the environs of the city secured this policy, by rendering it innocuous to the burgesses, who with every conquest received a *quid pro quo*. But war necessities waxed, and victory was often anything but instantaneous. Rome often indeed all but exhausted herself in the struggle. How fared the small freeholders, whether of older or of newer tenure, under such conditions?

Naturally they fared badly. As yet the expedient of Sp. Cassius was the only one that occurred to would-be reformers, and it was not enough. The citizen was called on, not only to serve in purely defensive operations, but also in aggressive warfare; and he had to pay a direct war-tax, the *tributum*—an advance, but an advance which ruined the smaller ratepayers, and disordered society by involving the peasant in debt, and by enabling the richer classes, senators, and knights, to recoup their own expenditure in taxation by usurious exactions from the poor.

And not merely did he pay this double tax, for himself and for his usurious banker, in an advance he could not bear, and a compound interest which made the advance a permanent charge; but he left his homestead for months and years to women and children and slaves. The master's eye and hand, which make up that 'magic of property' which 'turns sand to gold,' were withdrawn by the state, and, if lucky enough to escape 'the blood-tax,' the yeoman spent his best years in the field, not of agriculture, but of battle. Peasant properties, valuable as they are, if naturally evolved throughout a country, and when they are a real possession 'to have and to hold,' were ineffective in such a case. The wealthier orders could, through their bailiffs, manage large farms with profit, even when themselves absentees on foreign service. The poorer could not, nor could they forego without serious distress the profits which failed them. The war-contribution, or rather the interest paid at heavy rates to those who advanced it, would have swallowed up their gains in any case. As it was, it ruined them.

At first the agricultural distress was met by the sale of small properties, which fell into the hands of embryo capitalists. But this only made the lot of those farmers who held by their lands harder. The small-holding system was doomed.

The spokesmen of the people attempted to maintain it; the martyr Cassius, the reformer Icilius, the unhappy Maelius and others. After every success in war the policy was renewed. Veii fell, and the land-scheme was pushed to the front by Camillus. Even the protagonists of the senate essayed to bring into practice the grand system of relief, and the result was M. Manlius.

Manlius found the yeomanry, on whom Rome's victories depended, in the most heartrending condition. Each new application of the grand remedy of land-grants only made the peasant-occupier more easy to enslave. He could sell out, on the chance of a new grant, or he could be sold, *addictus*, to the claims of his creditor. As a slave he might be treated kindly, for domestic, not capitalistic, slavery was still in vogue, and he would not go to war. He might be left to farm his own old lands, or he might be cut to pieces by his pitiful creditors, a victim to a parasitic finance scheme of the state.

Manlius raised the standard of socialism and was executed; but he had introduced a new panacea—usury laws. An artificial system of utterly ineffective land-grants had failed, in the face of an exchequer which had but one expedient to raise its budget, the *tributum*. A new cry was added to the popular vocabulary, and that was all.

The fall of Manlius was followed by a land-grant. The Praenestine war turned the new *coloni* into mortgagees. Military colonisation was the next step, and politically an effective one, forerunner of empire. Economically it was but staving off the evil day. It made *latifundia* more secure and for the time permanent. It induced mortgagees to take the surrender values of their *possessionses*, and capitalists were often forced to become farmers on an extensive scale. It was a good palliative, where radical change was needed. It was in fact a *ver sacrum*, an expedient which never yet permanently benefited the old country, though it emancipates the needier colonists.

However, a time for more effectual remedies was coming. The wealthy plebeian, enriched by the interest, simple and compound, of his investments in mortgages and loans, was anxious to grasp at something more dignified in the way of office than a mere tribunate. What interest had he in bringing aid to an indebted plebeian against an aristocrat? was it not a case for 'ka me, ka thee'?

The wealthier commoners were in heart patrician; their ambition was official ascendancy. But how to obtain it? They were rejected at the elections by the practice of *nominatio* of a partisan character on the part of the nobles. They could only share the glories of the consulship by a constitutional right to one place. They could only get that right by a popular agitation. That popular agitation demanded for the leaders, *ut aller consulum e plebe crearetur*; for the followers, *ne quis plus quam D Jugera agri possideret*<sup>1</sup>, and the *lanx satura*, which tacked together these two dissimilar rogations, was the manifesto of Stolo and Sextius, which, after ten years agitation, resulted in the Sextio-Licinian legislation of 367 B.C. Sextius was the consul elected, and the once popular tribune was the first man condemned for violation of the law which was the popular side of his propaganda. Such a charter won by such a man transformed the political and economic position of Rome. The aristocracy of wealth and office succeeded to that of birth. The latter was assailable as *prerogative*; the former was unassailable, save by some law to the

<sup>1</sup> Liv. VI. 35.

effect that a *novus homo* must be elected. The result was that the senatorian ascendancy was reinforced from the opposing camp. The *optimates* succeeded the *nobiles*, and presented an impenetrable phalanx to the *populares* who were all that were left of the *plebeii*. And so with the economic change; it was important because private property and perpetual tenancy on a 'precarian' basis derived from the regal period, though previously all but identical, now became thoroughly differentiated. As in England bookland and folkland were all but equally secure, though state or king never surrendered certain rights in the latter and demanded thegn-service, so Rome in the greater part of her state-land given in 'possession' claimed still an interest, while private land was not to be usurped by the state. It was the domain-land which was affected by the Licinian scheme. Henceforth it became important whether land were leased by the state-officers—usually the censors—or granted 'in possession,' i.e. as revocable grants for an indefinite period, or 'assigned' as absolute property.

The laws of Licinius and Sextius limited *possessiones*; i.e. the adding of field to field, to be remunerative to the forecloser of mortgages and loans, must be of bookland or *ager assignatus*, and not of folkland, of which consisted by far the greater portion of the Roman territory, and which should have been made a standing treasury for the nation.

It is, we see, the old panacea. The enforcement of the Sextian limit relieved for a time, but not permanently. No regular machinery for the management of the *ager publicus* was provided; accumulation went on unchecked, for the magistrates did not enforce the laws, the senate did not insist authoritatively, the public did not agitate persistently, and their spokesmen apostatised. *Possessio* still became ownership by prescription, and laws contemned were worse than evils unforbidden.

But it may be questioned whether an artificial reconstruction of the older system would have availed, even if sincere and well carried out. At the time and for a time peasant-proprietorship, reinforced by military colonisation and well defined schemes of indirect taxation, might have subsisted by the side of a growing and grasping capitalism. But a renewal of the old troubles, *tributum* and military service, would have resulted in the old distress. That the *landwehr* should serve in offensive campaigns at a distance and still pay a property-tax at home, is enough to prove that the yeomanry could not have made their footing good as a class against capitalistic system. It was the policy of a city-state pursued by a state which was no longer a city; the policy of a commercial state enforced by a state which should have found its strength in agriculture. It could not have survived the Hannibalic war, scarcely the war with Pyrrhus. The *vis medicatrix naturae* does not extend to maintaining classes which bear the burden of war and fighting their battles against the competition of enterprising non-combatants. The widow is ousted from her *possessio* by fraud or force, or she sells; or the bread-winner, returning laden with debt, finds himself unable, war-worn and wounded as he is, to make headway against his difficulties, and sells or dies, leaving his

orphans, if they be not enslaved, at best paupers. The homestead is in any case given up, and the survivors, if free, are to be found swelling the *capite censi* of the capital. Rome swallowed up the broken fragments of what once looked like successful country-life.

The political result of the Sextian bills was therefore more enduring than the economic; and the consolidation of the ranks of officialism made further land-agitation for the time useless. The new leaders of the *populares* accordingly took up the heroic remedy of Manlius, and essayed to enforce usury-laws. The evils of usury, though decidedly overrated in antiquity, are exceedingly grave in a non-industrial state; but legislation is to be deprecated for the very strong reason that if money must be found it will be borrowed, and the greater the risk to the lender the greater the *versura* he hopes to make, i.e. usury-laws raise the price of loans, and so aggravate the ills they are intended to palliate. This did not occur to the Romans, with whom at first capital was scarce and interest high; and accordingly the decemviral legislation forbade any higher rate than *unciarum fenus*, 10% per annum. When, moreover, debt became the grievance of the popular party, this measure became far too moderate, and usury was first greatly reduced and then entirely forbidden by the tribunician law of Genucius (341 B.C.). The result was, of course, that hinted at above. The debtor, provided he was relieved temporarily by a little ready money, was willing, with the sanguine temperament which characterises his class, to promise anything. The interest was charged as principal, with the mortgagee's full consent, and distress continued.

The *lex Paetelia*, which dealt with such evasions—the so-called *nexum* frauds—soon became a dead letter. Debts were accredited to fictitious *socii* against whom common law did not avail, and the sums were recoverable in the equity court of the *praetor peregrinus*. Other evasions soon followed; the agitation was checkmated, and like the land-laws, *contemptu abolitae*, usury laws waxed obsolete. The evil was allowed to draw to a head and destroyed the industrial classes in the interests of a moneyed aristocracy. The yeomanry, and in general the lower middle classes of Rome, died out. A few rising above their order went to swell the ranks of the *optimates*. The rest flocked to Rome to form the *clientèle* of rich men, to clamour for state aid, to hire out as bravoës, and ultimately to rule the streets, and hasten despotism by annihilating government and society. We have the proletariat of Caesarean Rome in the germ, the 'permanent possibility of revolution' which demoralised the metropolis; and one of the main causes is the canker of debt which ate out the heart of the Roman farmer-class.

Not that the party-cry ceased, but it was ineffectual. It took the 'socialistic' form of *novae tabulae*, and it came in too sophisticated an age for a Solonian *σεισαχθεία*. In 90 B.C. the praetor Asellio was massacred by indignant creditors when he endeavoured to enforce obsolescent usury laws; Lucullus had to limit compound indebtedness to one *alterum tantum* of the principal. Cato's *furcm dupli condemnari*



*faeneratorum quadrupli* was impossible of accomplishment. Caesar had in 49, after the troubled times of misgovernment and non-government, to allow of and to enforce a partial *χρεῶν ἀποκοπή*, and yet this could not save the state from the terrible financial crisis of A.D. 33, which was only alleviated by the public spirit of Tiberius.

What a catchword was afforded by the usury laws to a Sulpicius, a Catiline, a Milo, or a Dolabella, is obvious. The evil at bottom was that of unequal taxation, not deliberate as in France before '89, but ill-judged; imposed perhaps in all good faith by men who did not understand that the essence of equality in taxation is equality of sacrifice. It created debt and distress, crushed the middle-classes, and recruited the mob of Rome, while the remedy offered gave the proletariat a rallying point, and helped on that anarchy which Rome's 'mixed government,' so bepraised by Polybius, originated. The hegemony of Roman power and of Greek culture, which was that historian's ideal, was not to be furthered either by that same 'mixed government' or by its economic policy, whether initiatory or remedial. The chapter of indebtedness is a bad one and the account may be closed. It was one, but only one, important factor in Roman decadence.

And yet in after times the period which directly followed the Paetelian law was looked upon as the beginning of Rome's real greatness. *Necti desierunt*, and for the moment the tribune was silent and the popular cause dormant. The magistrate had become conscious neither of his need of emancipation, nor of its glorious possibilities, and the *optimates* were a new oligarchy, as yet not disunited by the mutual repulsion of partial interests, or by the clashing of individual self-seekings. Senatorial rule had become a reality. It was the quiet before the storm.

For evil was as yet only in the germ, and an artificial or temporary harmony appeared in Rome. The 'periodic volcano of agitation' was seething indeed, but not at fever-heat. As yet the disintegration of government was arrested, and the demoralisation of society checked. *Moribus antiquis stat res Romana virisque*, and this at a time when remedial legislation for admitted evils was at an absolute discount, and the virus was looked on as ineradicable.

Internal history does not explain the unruffled calm; on the eve of the democratic charter, the Hortensian law, Rome was at peace with herself. The cause is to be looked for in external politics; Rome is staking her very life in the Samnite wars, and patriotism, if a state be not wholly dead, is a saving salt to arrest decay, if not to heal internal wounds. Rome, like Austria, Prussia, Spain, in 1808, postpones old quarrels to national calls for union, and the Samnite war, sullied as it is by the national dishonour at Caudium, vitalises Roman government by the intense need for self-assertion. Only a disheartened race is unequal to the demand for courage, and Rome never lost heart. Economics were put aside for politics, i.e. for history in the present; and in the internal records of Rome there is little matter of note save the mad Claudian schemes of pseudo-democracy, and the wise conservatism of Q. Fabius.

Thirty-seven years of war left Rome victorious, and then followed fresh agitation, but in a political direction rather than economical. The plebeian charter was renewed if not extended in 287. The conquest consummated at Sentinum gave land in plenty for state-grants. The law of debt had been abrogated by disuse in the hard times and amid the financial difficulties of prolonged war; and the dearth of political ideas prevented any new attempt at a solution of the economic problem. The payment of the soldiers which, though it dated from very early times (406 B.C.) was only gradually adopted in shorter campaigns, and the beginning of indirect taxation relieved the pressure. Land-grants postponed its recurrence. The effective portion of the *lex Poetelia* partially silenced agitation, and the acquiescence of the farmers in their exploitation, which found some vindication in a continued home-war with prospects often worse than dubious, closed for the time the old economic question. How would it again emerge?

The war with Pyrrhus still kept the attention of all parties fixed on external history, rather than on internal politics, and the strength and value of senatorian government could still be scarcely over-estimated. The aims, often inordinate and always all but inarticulate, of the *populares* only expressed themselves in old formulae now utterly voided of meaning. Yet for a moment the success of the government seemed scarcely an adequate guarantee for its permanency. The wars with Carthage saved the senate for a long period, and sealed the doom of senatorian government. With the recognition of Rome as one of the great powers, and with her collision with Carthage, a new economic era begins.

The farmer had been ousted, and in the end not utterly in opposition to his own will. The horrors of creditor-law had been mitigated in the one respect of personal enslavement, and both land-question and capital-question had apparently disappeared. So too the *comitia* and the consuls were in this period successfully, and all but by their own consent shelved, and constitutional questions were apparently also buried. To what end then this narrative? Because the old questions revive transformed, as scotched, not killed. The wars with Carthage show Rome in her grandeur; and at the same time display the tendencies which result in her decadence. Politically and economically Carthage gave to Rome 'the shirt of Nessus' in the problem of empire, for a state whose 'idea' was civic, and in the problem of capitalistic competition for a people whose ideal was domestic, i.e. in the difficulty of combining extension with fulness, and of making the old *respublica* and *familia* still intelligible when the one meant the Mediterranean civilisation, and the other the plantation system. Rome's mismanagement in the provinces was often inherited. Her false policy, which construed *praedia* as *praeda*, and which, with other elements of degeneracy, found place in C. Gracchus' plan of campaign, was bequeathed by Hiero and by Carthaginian viceroys. But the evil

<sup>1</sup> Mommsen.

κατ' ἐξοχήν which we find adopted by Rome from Punic economy is capitalistic slavery. The disease which was to destroy Carthage should destroy Rome.

An account of the Punic Wars and their political results is here unnecessary. An account of the wars in Greece is also needless. Rome found herself imperial in the face of 'the fundamental defect of antiquity—that it never fully advanced from the civic form of constitution' to a higher conception of the nature of a state; and Rome found herself capitalistic and bourgeois; in antagonism to another fundamental principle of antiquity that the πόλις and the οἰκία were the true units, and not each and any Titius or Seius.

The effect of this change was that aggregation took the place of organisation politically, and the constitutional system broke down; the first condition of successful action on the part of a magistrate was tacit rebellion—a Spinther hesitated and did nothing, a Gabinius ignored all authority, and became arbiter of the fate of a nation. And individualism or moral atomism superseded association economically. The self-will and self-seeking of a citizen came to constitute his effectiveness. The homestead as a unit disappeared, and with it the 'economy' and the morality of the older *familia*, its patriarchal simplicity and its *patria potestas*. The place thus left void was filled by the plantation, with the morality and economy of slaves and slave-masters, with the division of labour to a point at which the individual ceased to be more than a wheel in a machine, and with the government of the *ergastulum*.

The slavery of earlier times was at least excusable if not justifiable, for domestic slavery was probably a moral advance, a substitution of a milder doom for the savage wholesale butchery of prisoners which had theretofore obtained. The merciful dispensation of slavery, however, began to lose its favourable aspect with the rise of bondage for debt, a corrupt development which became the grievance of a successful agitation. The defect had disappeared before the period of the great wars, and at the commencement of the magnificent struggle in which the prestige of the senatorian rule secured it an unconstitutional probuleutic power and a strong *potentia* with the executive, only domestic slavery existed in the Roman state. Capitalism had only just won the upper hand on the land question, and had been nominally defeated on the bankruptcy bills, and the commercial revolution had only begun. At the close of the great wars plutocracy was rampant, and a web of plantations overspread the whole Roman system.

And the reason is obvious. Carthage was as unfitted for empire as Venice or Amsterdam, and ruled in the interest of a mercantile cabal. Government was in the hands of and for the advantage of the slave-holders in a joint-stock company; and hence, wherever the sovereignty or protectorate of Carthage extended, capitalistic production by slave-gangs and the whole machinery of the later Roman economy were in full vogue. Rome, as Carthage shrunk into her inmost fastnesses, was forced to take up the reins of government, and she had no organisation ready. She developed one, but it was

necessarily imperfect, and she could not give the essential of new life, a free population. Her victories, substantial or petty, gave her prisoners in plenty, and she utilised them to carry out the Carthaginian scheme. She could not maintain a peasantry in Italy, much less in Sicily and provinces more remote. And the result was a slavery which was worse than death to the slave, and which brought a nemesis with it. From the time of the battle of Zama, transmarine corn, produced by slave-labour and at small cost except in human life, was extensively imported by the Roman government. It was in many cases grown by Roman monopolists, not under provincial restrictions; and the cost of transportation was cheaper than from middle Italy. The development of the Padane valley as the granary of Rome was for ever rendered impracticable. The government sold to the proletariat at under cost price, or left the corn, never paid for but received as a tithe in kind, to the lessees of the tithe, who could still undersell even the capitalistic home-grower. The market was at the same time lessened, for the armies were supplied by the corn-payments of subjects, and so was the metropolis. Small farming, on *possessions* too small for pasturage, was not to be dreamed of. From Sicily, 'the chosen land of the plantation system,' the capitalistic slave-farming invaded Italy. *Latifundia* with summer and winter pastures became the economic order in Italy. Italy was depopulated, and a competitive *sauve qui peut* ruled with no hope for the vanquished; *neque ullus procedentis finis est, nisi cum in alterum divitem inciderit*.

The rise too of that competitive struggle, which is always the *reductio ad absurdum* of a bourgeois political economy, was assisted by further considerations. The blood-tax of prolonged war was only paid by the more than decimation of the staple recruiting classes, and the burden now fell also on the Italian 'allies.' The farmer in social territory—or in Roman where he still existed—was required for foreign service, and competition, always futile, was made doubly hopeless by a compulsory absenteeism. His acres were swallowed up by capitalism, and the *agrestia per longinquos saltus et ferocia servitia*<sup>1</sup>, which roused the Roman spirit in Ti. Gracchus, and were the standing problem of the disorganised Republic and of the Western empire, succeeded.

And actual legislation did its work also. Flaminius, a true demagogue, introduced or instigated, during the course of the Second Punic War, the law known as the Claudian, prohibiting senators from commerce or trade of any kind<sup>2</sup> and forbidding a senator to undertake state contracts<sup>3</sup> (*redemptiones*). The senator who was wealthy became, accordingly, a capitalistic grazier, with sheep-farms as extensive as those of Southern Australia in a country so straitened as Italy. The 'knight,' i.e. the *eques* or non-senatorian capitalist, harried the provinces, as tax-gatherer, banker, or usurer, and where he obtained magisterial sanction or connivance, wrung money from

<sup>1</sup> Tac. Ann. iv. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Dio. lv. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Liv. xxi. 63.

the unfortunate subjects. The senator revelled in the profits of his *latifundia*, and scarcely felt the evil of depopulation and of a slave-system which was the growing danger of the state. But Pliny was right when, reading the riddle which the senate had failed to answer, and interpreting the antecedents in the full light of the consequents, he declared that *latifundia perdidere Italiam*. They were, however, but one cause in the destruction, and only found full scope under the empire when the metayer-tenancy of the *colonatus* was applied in partial solution of the problem. Rome had in republican days no semi-emancipation of shepherds and *fossores* to offer, for the rural slaves were not sufficiently denationalised to make such an alleviation of their lot safe. She emancipated city-slaves, however, and increased the proletariat by the accession of *liberti*, of an anti-Roman culture, to their ranks. She imposed a tax on emancipations because they were not safe, but she found them necessary, and she accordingly added to the *déclassés* descendants of the old yeomanry, and to the sophisticated petty tradesmen, and the disaffected artisans of the city, freedmen without patriotism for Rome, and without interest in the government. The freedmen reinforced the already growing rabble, and joined in the empty party-cries of their patrons or of the tribunes. They forced on the development of that spirit which demanded 'bread and the games' as the price of order, and which transformed *Vielkinderei* into pauperism. The proletariat became an element of disturbance which defied police and was only to be quieted by arms. The demand for a military tyranny was becoming effective, for in Rome as in the provinces the needs of the time 'necessitated the appointment of governors whose position was absolutely incompatible . . . with the Roman constitution<sup>1</sup>.' A virtual dictatorship was perforce conceded to the great general of the day, and not all proconsuls would refrain, like Scipio Aemilianus, from turning their arms against the government itself. The senate was fortunate in being saved, once and again, by this the greater of the Scipiones, and by Sulla; but the autocracy of Aemilianus, with his *taceant quibus Italia noverca*, and his sound judgment of Ti. Gracchus, was the last opportunity for the arrest of the decline before it became downfall.

But the riches of the *equites*, just after an exhausting war, require some explanation, and it would seem to be this. The enormous gold agio of the Hannibalic wars<sup>2</sup>, which was a species of national bankruptcy, was not also repudiation, and the *redemptiones* of enormous nominal sums undertaken by those who had money were liquidated in full at the close of the war. The monopolists of the gold-supply doubled, trebled and multiplied beyond belief their whole fortunes, in the unprecedented tightness of the money-market. Those fortunes they invested, when the war was over, in the advancing of taxes to the state. They farmed the taxes and turned over their money again and again, and not always too honestly. And they

<sup>1</sup> Mommsen, iii. cap. 11, vol. II. p. 337.

<sup>2</sup> Pliny, H. N. xxxiii. 13.

became a rival order to the senate and, though always 'ballasting the restlessness of discontent with the salutary inertia of . . . self-interest,' their ideal was a police under the influence of a moneyed aristocracy, rather than a strong oligarchy. When C. Gracchus *bicipitem civitatem fecit*<sup>1</sup>, and boasted that he had brought in an apple of discord<sup>2</sup>, he was only making explicit an implicit rivalry which must have resulted in disunion and struggle. By the judiciary laws the *ordo equester* sat in judgment on those who were the only check on the extreme operation of the joint-stock company principle of imperial administration. C. Gracchus wittingly hastened the end, as by his *lex frumentaria* he hastened the evolution of the rioters of the reign of terror, as by his military law he dissolved the only natural principle which could maintain the citizen-army united, and as by his proposed Italian franchise he would have swamped the *comitia* beyond salvation. That he was 'a political incendiary with a consuming passion for vengeance'<sup>3</sup> is probably true, for all these measures traversed the family-policy of agrarian reform. That 'he wished . . . to introduce . . . a Tyrannis, that is . . . a monarchy . . . of the Napoleonic absolute type—in the form of . . . an unlimited tribuneship for life' is almost certainly false, for he must have seen that any consul could have crushed him in a week, or at most a month. C. Gracchus is only important to us as rendering the political government disunited, and exposing its weakness, when only concentration and apparent strength could save it; as showing, or at least attempting to show, the impotence of democracy 'in a Commonwealth which had outgrown collective assemblies and had no knowledge of parliamentary government'; as proving the impossibility in a 'popular' magistrate of carrying the state by a *tour de force*; in opening a way for economic evils to have free course, by pauperising the proletariat and withal exhausting the treasury, and paying a premium to idleness; in fine, by making explicit each and all of the evils, economic and political, which were at bottom responsible for the state's decadence. C. Gracchus, according to this reading of his character, is at first a socialist; at last a nihilist. He may have honestly believed that the only solution of the problem of wealth and want was a chaos which should in the fulness of time give way to a new cosmos. But he was the Bakunin of Rome.

The digression is not unimportant, for C. Gracchus was, in a sort, the projection of all the fatal tendencies of the decline, and their embodiment in a personal influence. Thé proletariat was ready to hand, and he made that underselling of the Italian farmer customary which had been exceptional. He confirmed the demoralisation of the city and the wasting of Italy. The senate was on the verge of destruction, and he lent it a hand for the leap into the abyss. The army was declining and he destroyed it, leaving the stage clear for the work of Marius. Discontent, and that 'cheap courage which

<sup>1</sup> Varro.

<sup>2</sup> Cic. Leg. iii. 9. 20.

<sup>3</sup> V. Mommsen, iv. cap. 3, vol. III. pp. 119-120.

risks the goods of others' were rife, and he gave them voice. He presided over the baphometric baptism of the coming Terror.

In his brother we have a less original reformer, and a less able man. Ti. Gracchus exposed the evil of the plantation system, but the remedy he proposed was one which had been rejected as inadequate. He was no nihilist, but he tried to revive the laid ghost of the constitution in an appeal to the *plebs*, and the obsolete agrarianism of the Licinian rogations by a family-commission for a *γῆς ἀναδασμὸς*. In his first movement he was successful, for the senate, if materially right, was formally wrong; but he spoilt the whole effect of his programme by the deposition of Octavius. He gave a precedent which justified Gabinius in working on the faintheartedness of the tribune Trebellius, and which carried the Gabinian law. He justified, again, the Vatinian plebiscite, and emancipated Pompeius, and gave Caesar Gaul. *ὡς ἀπόλοιτο καὶ ἄλλος ὅτις τοιαῦτά γε ῥέζου.*

In his second movement he failed, except in giving temporary relief to the distressed, and in raising for a time the census. Polybius had said that a distribution of land, such as that carried into effect by Agis III of Sparta, and by Ti. Gracchus, was the last evil of ochlocracy; but he had not seen the Gracchi, and he even underestimated the effect. The revival of the Licinian bill against all prescription, in an age when what was wealth in 367 was esteemed poverty, and when peasant-properties had utterly failed, was not only absurd but iniquitous. The senators had been forced by the *lex Claudia* to become landowners in their own despite, and their vested interests should have been valid. It was therefore a flagrant invasion of rights which was moreover utterly ineffectual, and can only be treated as a dangerous panacea offered by a charlatan.

This was not the means to use in the solution of the social problem. The evil lay deeper in that proletariat which had been created by the wars, taxation and usury of early days, and had been stereotyped by the legacy of Carthage—an empire ruined by stock-broking, a stock-broking system cursed with empire. The proletariat had been modified by the constant wars and the constant use of the *vindicta*. It had been demoralised by prices permanently under cost of production. It had been brutalised by the gladiatorial shows which made the lot of the slave-*familia* harder. And with this monster Ti. Gracchus tried the spell which had been proved powerless ages before. The first Gracchan reform bill was directly occasioned by the first Sicilian slave-war, and to this perhaps is owing the slight glimmer of understanding which appears in the extension of *possessions* by a sort of *jus liberorum*. But the slave-system is not hinted at, much less controlled; and in that and in the city mob, or in their common causes lay the evil.

Ti. Gracchus was the socialist of the revolution, as his brother was the nihilist. Though his socialism was not explicit, it appears in the germ. He caused rich and poor to confront one another definitely as in hostile camps. He showed the impotence of the individual who had no property 'to interpret himself to himself.' He renewed the democratic pretensions of the lower orders, and he directly caused a



shaking or perplexing of public opinion in its feeling of right. And all this without a positive propaganda.

Gaius followed and denied the necessity of any such propaganda, burning simply for blood-letting to clear the way for the evolution of the state *ab initio*. The decline was accomplished, the *facilis descensus* was changing into *praeceps ruina*, when the leaders of the Roman state were such apostles of anarchy.

We have thus far looked on the proletariat as the outcome of the false economy of Rome. Let us now turn to the other side of the medal, and review the *ordo equester* and their chattels in the same light. The temporary emergencies of the Hannibalic war had created a class such as was evolved under the empire by the permanent gold-shrinkage, and with like tendencies and ambitions, those of a Crassus to wit, or a Didius. But under the empire the question of depopulation became important, not only in reference to the army and to morality, but in respect to national existence; and the appreciation of human life prevented the horrors of slavery reaching to their present extent. Slaves they must have, for the Roman people would not work for hire—they were the ‘mean whites’ of Virginian civilisation almost exactly, and bread was dear, flesh and blood cheap. The whip, the *ergastulum*, and the cross became familiar. The slaves in desperation rose in Sicily in 134 B. C., and again in 104. The gladiator-slaves under Spartacus ravaged Italy, all but unchecked, and Crassus stepped from the praetor’s court to the *praetorium* to quell revolution. And this in spite of daily emancipations restrained, perhaps wisely, by tax, and in spite of—perhaps in consequence of—daily executions. Italy was ripe for change, wherever the slave could hope for liberty, and the free-man for quiet. The supply of the slave-market was scarcely kept up by the slave-hunts—wars the triumphators styled them—of Rome in the East. Every new slave brought with him an earnest hatred to Rome and to the orders *senatorius et equester*, the incarnation of the hateful system. The demand grew greater and greater; the lot of the chattel harder and harder. Slavery alone would have wrecked Rome, had the slave-owners been a nobler race. But they were essentially immoral. Their gains were sterile—commercial at best, never industrial. They did not even fulfil the mission of modern stock-exchange speculators, and equate supply and demand present and future; for supply was furnished without price, and demand was glutted by corn and oil, and shows. They understood finance, but they practised it solely for private ends. They turned money over the *cistophorus* question, they established their bimetallic contracts on a sound footing, they farmed taxes, and a Verres was their patron and intimate, a Rufus their scapegoat. They would starve out the corporation of an indebted township, and bring it to terms. They would take advantage of Roman privilege in their dealings with subject-races, and would expect Roman privilege to be permanent. They drew their wealth from the provinces or the country, and they brought it all to Rome. They centralised the commerce of the empire in the hall of their stock-exchange, and they decentralised the government of the

empire in order to scramble for the spoils. They had only self-interest at heart, and self-interest is proverbially shortsighted. The slaves turned against the old orders in the century of civil war, and were the instruments of the proscription, and though the orders continued, they were decimated, their goods were depreciated, their fortunes sapped. Julius, Octavian, and Tiberius struck a blow at indirect taxation *per publicanos*, and the *ordo equester* as well as the senate were plundered freely. If there was a justification for the Roman revolution, it is to be found especially in this, that it dealt out a richly deserved humiliation and retribution to a blood-guilty capitalism.

We have referred often to the change which took place in the army. It was the last step in the internal, the first in the external revolution. The decay of the yeomanry before the Punic Wars was at their close virtual extinction. The armies were then recruited from constantly lower classes. The *capite censi*, once only summoned for naval or inferior service, were called into the field. In the time of Polybius the *classis* of from 1100 to 4000 asses was called into active warfare, and this despite depreciation and adulteration of the coinage. In the time of C. Gracchus military service is no longer a privilege of the burgess, but a burden to be shared, if possible, with the *socii*. All this tended to demoralise the army, and to denationalise it, and consequently, before Numantia, Aemilianus has to create his army: Metellus has to make an army in Numidia. The aristocratic cavalry is a burden rather than a service to the general. He establishes a volunteer bodyguard in the *praetoriani*. The national army is doomed.

But the national army is the *universus populus* of the centuriate *comitia*, and with the army must fall the *populus*. And the senate falls with the constitution, only the new power will need an *imperium* which is valid, and so a new army.

The slave-war of 134 B. C., and the disasters against Jugurtha and against the Cimbri prove that the decline has in this direction run its course. Had Viriathus lived, he would have saved Numantia, and severed Spain from the empire, as Sertorius did, for his lifetime. Had Jugurtha been a Masinissa, or still more a Hannibal, Africa would have been torn from Roman hands, and Rome herself might have fallen. Rome must have an army or abdicate her sovereignty in the empire, in the nation, even in the city. Marius saves Rome by inventing the instrument of her destruction, the cohortal army. *Milites scribere non more majorum neque ex classibus, sed ubi cujusque cupido erat, capite censos plerosque*<sup>1</sup>. The army is formed by enlistment. A soldier's training is made common and professional. A soldier serves and looks to his leader as a despotic chief whom he must obey; he learns to be orderly, and to submit to discipline; he sees the intolerable anarchy of Rome; and he sees the necessity for Marius, or Pompeius, or Caesar, their quick decision and their power at the head of affairs. Marius made the army, and reaped Metellus' laurels in Numidia. He defeated the Cimbri, and became

<sup>1</sup> Sall. Jug. 86.

virtual dictator. He had no political genius and he failed; but others would not fail. What matters it whether it were Lucullus, or a Pompeius, or a Caesar that was successful, a Moreau, a Joubert-Dumouriez, or a Napoleon? Much doubtless to the empire. Nothing to dying Rome.

The army was evolved. The *Quirites* were dissolved. The social war swamped them politically and, having no further military character, they could be of no further effectiveness. The senate's mismanagement was responsible for the troubles. Individuals reaped the laurels of the restoration. The time was come, and Sulla seized it; but for his cause, not for himself. Pompeius was more selfish, but incompetent, and Caesar triumphed.

Could Sulla have saved the republic? for if he could, the decline must be traced through the Ciceronian age. He could not. His frivolity and his indifferentism in morals cause him to be suspected of lack of thoroughness, but the suspicion is unjust. He left the slavery, the proletariat, the freedmen, the Italians, the proscribed, the politically annihilated 'ordo equester,' the discontented veterans; the marshals of the civil war; but could he have removed any of these fatal obstacles to the reaction?

After C. Gracchus, certainly not. The new army was a necessity for any strong government; and the old scheme of land-grants, reduced to an absurdity by Ti. Gracchus, in opposition to the whole trend of Roman history, was used wisely but in vain, to render it quiescent. The marshals were a necessity, for Sertorius and Lepidus, to say nothing of Mithradates, survived. The proletariat and the slaves were made the constants of revolution by the Gracchan reforms. The Italians were an irreducible element in the state after 89, and were also necessary in Sulla's scheme to abrogate, potentially at least, the *comitia*. The continued existence of the *equites* was necessary, for they supplied the organisation of the empire more than the senate itself, and should they have been totally massacred? And finally the 'animadversio in post futuros,' though to be deprecated, seems to have been rather the expression of the undying hatred of his party to the promoters of the civil war, than anything personal to Sulla, and necessary for a generation at least in order to prevent a new *coup d'état*. On the constitutional side he perceived the mistakes and the radical faults of the state-machinery, and remedied them; he had only failed in two things, he had not taken account of the verdict of the *Zeitgeist* in favour of imperialism as against nationalism, or still more as against civicism. He still thought of *imperium civile*; he had not reckoned with the inherent inadequacy of senatorian government to maintain itself under the new 'historic category'; he could not see that it would be unable to control its pashas, and that it could not exist except as 'the old constitution,' which under Sulla it was not.

Or if he saw and recognised that the evils objected were ineradicable, and that restored by force it must be retained by force, he must have shrugged his shoulders with Epicurean calmness and murmured the Greek equivalent for *Après moi le déluge*.

To sum up, then, the economic side of Roman decadence, we see the origin of the evil in the extinction of the middle classes—a fact which brought with it its own punishment in the decline of the *landwehr* and the necessity for those armies which became the merely personal followings of great leaders, and which slew no less than six leaders during the ‘civil war,’ notably Flaccus, Cinna, and Carbo; which enacted in fact the part of the praetorians under the emperors.

From the decay of the middle classes dates the rise of the proletariat. It became impossible for the man of small means to maintain himself in the competition of capitalists, often assisted by direct legislation in favour of the strong holder. The proletariat grew, idled, and talked; slaves did its work, and the plantation system appeared. Emancipations changed the character of the proletariat for the worse; it became the grand cause of anarchy; it was organised into clubs and claques; it took bribes, and bullied and blustered for pay. It showed the incompetence of the old government, and became gradually an Adullamite party which was a good recruiting ground for the army of an *imperator*—the criminal, the spendthrift, the profligate and the like constituted a nucleus of political discontent. Ti. Gracchus faced the evils, and attempted to combat the Hydra with the wooden sword of ‘the vice in the old comedy.’ For a time, if statistics are reliable, he stopped depopulation, but he invented fatal constitutional precedents and died a martyr in the cause of the impossible. And he left a socialistic negative propaganda to those who might come after.

C. Gracchus, of malice aforethought, plunged the sovereign people into the depths of dehumanised pauperism. He taught them to lay their hands on provincial revenues; and to play off merchant prince and hereditary noble one against the other. He abolished corporal punishment anew, when it was most needed. He deposed the senate, roused Italy to fierce agitation, and accomplished nothing but the prelude to an amorphism which to the nihilist implies a perfect *παλιγγενεσία*. He gave a perfect exposition of the revolution, and died to give it what it needed, a conscious martyr.

Marius made a new army out of the material to hand; Gladiators, slaves, Italians became soldiers and citizens during the bustling period that followed. The nation longed for peace, the provinces for relief, the less well-disposed longed for a struggle and a scramble. The struggle came, and after it the peace; a Cato is the caricature of senatorianism, a Crassus of mercantilism, a Spartacus of the plantation system, a Verres of provincial administration, a Clodius of the mob-rule, a Pompeius of the new militarism; and the onesided views represented by all these gave way before Caesar’s political and economic genius, which yet failed to grasp all or nearly all the detail of the decline of which he was the outcome. *Victrix causa deis* and not too soon.

Such is the account of Roman decline which we have to offer. But what, it may be asked, supposing this to be the whole account

of the decay,—what shall we say of the judgment of Romans themselves<sup>1</sup>, that irreligion, luxury, cosmopolitanism, bribery, falsity, immorality, were the true causes of Rome's downfall?

In our view they are rather effects and symptoms than truly efficient causes. And they are symptoms of degeneracy from the good old times, which are noted by historians haphazard, and each with an exaggerated prominence, and an emphasis which the original writers would probably disown. 'The man died of gout' is a fair expression of a certain fact, but on analysis it amounts only to this: he died of that for which gout is the outward and visible sign, and of which gout is even an outlet and a remedy. We will, however, consider them briefly, in turn.

Doubtless it was an evil day for Rome when the *Senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus* was needed; no doubt the introduction of eastern orgiastic worships into the capital was in a sense the ruin of one more pillar of conservatism. It is equally true, too, that the religious charlatanism, which so infected society as to cause a Marius to advise with his sorceress, a Sertorius to masquerade with his white doe, was a sad sign of changed times. The scandals of 114 B. C. and of 61 were similar symptoms of grave degeneracy, but to attach a serious importance to them as efficient is, we think, to label antecedents as causes much too hastily.

The adoption of Greek philosophy by the Scipionic circle, the philosophical scepticism of Lucretius, the pantheism which we find under the empire in Lucan<sup>2</sup> are politically not on a level with the *Aufklärung* expounded by Voltaire and Rousseau; and in the same way Isis and Cybebe might perhaps depose Jupiter, but their votaries did not carry their propaganda into a war on Terminus. Such things are to be regarded as proofs of the way in which Rome had become a *colluvies* of the nations, and nothing more.

There was a really effective irreligion, but it was of an early introduction. It was that which prostituted priestly offices and functions to political purposes, and which brought in the *Aelia et Fufia* for its palladium; that desecration of the auspices and other spiritual survivals of the old Etruscan state-religion to purposes for which, after the days of the first sacred wars, the Greeks<sup>3</sup> had seldom used even oracles. It was, however, in the days of the most successful rule that Rome ever enjoyed,—that of the Carthaginian war-time—that this irreligious system of auspices and *speciones* is found in its full vitality.

And luxury, too, is at least as much an effect as a cause. Luxury may have helped to destroy the empire, but it in no sense ruined the republic—and this despite Montesquieu's judgment<sup>4</sup> that in a commonwealth luxury is fatal because against equality—in a monarchy helpful within limits as distinguishing classes.

<sup>1</sup> V. Lucan Phars. i. 158-182; Sall. Cat. 10-13, etc.

<sup>2</sup> *E. g.* ix. 580.

<sup>3</sup> For an instance to the contrary, see Thuc. v. 54.

<sup>4</sup> *Espr. des Lois*, vii. 4.

Doubtless the aviaries and fishponds, the entertainments and spectacles, the villas and *familiae* which prompted that catena of sumptuary legislation which begins with the *lex Orchia* and does not close with the *lex sumptuaria Augusti*<sup>1</sup> show at the least the existence of a grave evil. Legislators strove to preach it down and drive it under cover, and yet we have the debts of Curio, of Antonius, of C. Caesar himself. A Catiline, a Milo and a Dolabella essayed to save themselves and the *Jeunesse dorée* by a resort to *novae tabulae*. Nevertheless it is to be doubted whether, in a pre-industrial age, the excesses were beyond legitimate expectation, and whether they were really harmful in any marked degree.

We are not of course concerned to offer an apology for luxury in general, even as constituting a rational reserve fund for times of exceptional distress; but surely there was much excuse for Rome. Was not the luxury which prevented the capitalistic racking of the provinces and the afforestation of Italy from an indefinite extension even a blessing? The Romans had not studied industrial policy, but they at least understood usury, and the *comes* or *attaché* of a provincial governor was perhaps less of a curse than the respectable Atticus or the moral Brutus. A Roman bill of fare as described by Macrobius<sup>2</sup> or in 'Peregrine Pickle' involved at all events a demand for labour in the better sense, and 'enriched in passing many an industrious hand, and supported more poor than philanthropy with its expenditure of aims',<sup>3</sup> and many more than the capitalistic speculation of the second century B. C.

With cosmopolitanism we need hardly deal; for save through the fatal capitalistic slavery of declining Rome, cosmopolitanism would never have found a real inlet; and with its cause we have already become familiar. As an element in demoralisation it is a secondary, not a primary cause. But what of bribery and corruption?

Here, too, we see symptoms not causes of decay—'invariable concomitants' which are yet not important factors in the result, of which they are, indeed, rather the creations. In so far as they are part and parcel of the political system, they come under the economic development of the proletariat, and so far only are they even of importance in Roman history. A Verres is a plague-spot in a nation, but a Verres and men like Verres are genuine products of Roman political and economic civilisation. The emancipated magistrate who must face an *εἰσὺν* before *publicani* and *negotiatores*, if he have sufficient wickedness in him naturally becomes a Verres. *Verrinum jus* is, in the decline, a specialised version of *jus Romanum*.

So, too, the long list of enactments *de repetundis*, and the very existence of the *divinatio* as a regular feature of judicial procedure, may be and are ill-omened, but they are palliatives of an evil ingrain, of which we have treated. For the rest, bribery did little or no harm. The *populus* was proletarian, and without hope of becoming by reform or by revolution an efficient in government, and the bribes of a

<sup>1</sup> Tac. iii. 54; A. Gell. ii. 24.

<sup>2</sup> iii. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Mommsen, v. 11, vol. IV. p. 507.

Crassus no more pauperised them than the *frumentaria lex* of a Gracchus. Among a pauper-mob they might even do good, for they might divert capital from the enslavement, by compound indebtedness, of industrial subject communities<sup>1</sup>.

The really harmful bribery, then, was not that of the elections; while that of the law-courts was, until Rome was actually tottering to its fall, only that of the extortion-*quaestio*, and that was a product, of the system. Nor was it otherwise with general political corruption. The buying of elections, which called forth the law of 159, was, in the complex of anomalies which went to form the Roman state, perhaps even a postponement of the decline, for it might conduce to the continuance of senatorian ascendancy. And when we reach the disgraceful private bribery of 54 B.C.<sup>2</sup>, fully analysed by Montesquieu<sup>3</sup>, republican Rome had really ceased to be. 'Bribery and corruption,' then, and any 'ambition' which went beyond *liberalitas* and *benignitas* according to the delicate phrasing of the laws, might and did affect the discount rate<sup>4</sup>, but for anything else they were powerless.

Among the catchwords which we have taken haphazard the next perhaps is of most importance. Falsity, by which we understand the *plus quam Punica fides* of Rome, begins early with the Caudine disaster; but then it has some extenuating circumstances. Later, bad faith had a precedent which might have taught the nations not to treat with a magistrate, but only with Rome. But it is nevertheless impossible to deny that the honour of Rome 'was permanently dragged in the mire by a perfidy and faithlessness without parallel, by the most wanton trifling with capitulations and treaties<sup>5</sup>,' the most flagrant instances of which are the treaty of a Pompeius with the Numantines in 139, and the state-repudiation of Mancinus in 137, in which latter case not only the consul—a man not received in the leading aristocratic coteries, and therefore sacrificed as an outsider—but every officer who had sworn to the treaty should have been given up.

There is no excuse, moreover, to be offered, save that 'international law ceases just where universal monarchy begins,' i.e. that a Napoleonic eagerness for victory blinds states to right, and makes them grasp at every subterfuge on the ground that all is fair in love or war. As, however, international conventions were scarcely recognised, and Phœnician and Greek are tainted with the same fault, and as even in modern times—notable in our own self-assertion against Denmark which issued in Nelson's victory at Copenhagen—the rights of belligerents have often been held extremely doubtful, we may perhaps dismiss 'bad-faith' as a cause of Roman decline, or, at least, of Roman decline specially; though, no doubt, it avenged itself,—possibly in the murder of Cn. Pompeius.

Our last formula still remains to be considered—the somewhat wide term 'immorality.' Was immorality, then, in any large sense

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Sall. Cat. 40; Tac. Ann. iii. 40; Dio. lxii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Cic. ad Att. iv. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Grand. et Déc. des Romains, cap. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Cic. ad Att. iv. 15.

<sup>5</sup> Mommsen iv. cap. 1. vol. III. p. 61.

a *vera causa* of the fall of the Roman Republic? We venture to think not, though in its reflex action on the causes and occasions of the decline it is of a graver importance than most of the elements with which it has been classed. It deserves, therefore, a somewhat more detailed attention.

The idea of immorality that is in the minds of those who hold that the fall of a nation is usually a national judgment for a national sin, is one which comprises in a single view that festering mass of evil which appears, for example, in Cicero's speech on behalf of Cluentius. We take it to mean unfaith and unchastity in all their varied consequences; and in respect of these the brief against Rome is a grave one.

For the old Roman domestic ideals had, long before the days of Caesar, died completely out. Before the revolution was well begun, a censor could expound the cynical theory that *si sine uxore possemus, quiritēs, esse, omnes ea molestia careremus*<sup>1</sup>, and the doctrine could gain the adhesion of Cato of Utica<sup>2</sup>. Celibacy had to be discountenanced by actual disabilities and by premiums on marriage, such as were the old *uxorium* or bachelor-tax, the *jus liberorum* conceded in the programme of Ti. Gracchus, the compulsory marriage urged by Metellus<sup>3</sup>, and the *πολυπαίδας ἀθλα* of Gaius Julius' first consulship. Marriages *de convenance* and divorces were common, as the cases of Pompeius, of Cicero, and of Caesar himself amply prove. Women were emancipated, and their liberty was license; Praecia, the mistress of Cethegus, could appoint to provincial commands, as in the case of Lucullus<sup>4</sup>; Clodia had an equal or a worse influence; Fulvia and Sempronia<sup>5</sup> prove in the downfall how far moral corruption had spread. Isis worship, and the like, gained increasing hold of Rome. The worst immoralities flourished, and openly. And in the face of a threatening depopulation, all the sins of a sophisticated metropolis ran their course.

But we think it would yet be a mistake to erect these vices of the declining Roman people into the principal scourge which hastened the revolution. It is not a case of the Theban clubs in the time of Polybius, and it is an evil which has still to run its course under Nero and Domitian. From the dates too of our examples it will be seen that the most striking cases are of a date later than the consummation of the decline, and the beginnings of revolution. We shall perhaps, then, not be wrong in attributing the growth of Roman demoralisation to that capitalistic system which imported the corrupter elements of more infected societies as slaves, and which made Rome a Greek city, full of pliant parasites and sycophants who won their freedom by their supple complaisances and introduced libertinism. And if so, immorality, like the rest, becomes a secondary element in the decadence.

<sup>1</sup> Metellus Numidicus ap. A. Gell. i. 6. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Lucan ii. 388 sqq.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Cic. de Off. ii. 21 *Non esse in republica duo millia hominum qui rem haberent*, etc. Capitalism and the proletariat necessitated an artificial policy to create a middle class.

<sup>4</sup> Dio. xliii. 25.

<sup>5</sup> Sall. Cat. 25.



Why, then, mention elements in Roman demoralisation which are not to be classed as causes or reasons for the decline? There are many grounds for so doing; firstly, they are noteworthy as showing the effects of the Roman system, and, negatively, its sins of omission, for 'in all moral machinery the moral results are the test<sup>1</sup>.' And again, they are remarkable as showing that the state was sapped down to its very foundation, since the *principium* of Rome was sternly moral. They prove, too, the hopelessness of regeneration, when all alike shared in the rottenness; they demonstrate the need for a *tabula rasa* when all things political, economic, social and moral are hopelessly blurred. Or again, they are of value, since though effects, they must react, if a state be not merely mechanical but organic. And if none of these reasons are adequate, yet 'distinguendo copulenter' since they round off Roman life, by touching—lightly and superficially perhaps, but still touching—on the sins and failures of every class. For these reasons, then, a consideration of these so-styled factors in the decline is not unjustified.

Leaving side-issues, however, the reason for Roman decline seems to lie in this: the Roman constitution was compounded, but not blended; mixed, but not harmonised. It was a system of partial expressions of the political will, of which each was artificially and morbidly developed to limit the others, but none was in itself efficient or self-determinant.

The result was that reform was from the first incongruous and all but inconceivable, for it meant reconstitution; and all measures for the prevention of decline were accordingly partisan, onesided, and personal. Economic legislation appeared indeed, at an early date, in the department of finance, and robbed one element in the state of its vitality without destroying it; the *populus* was paralysed by the *tributum*, only galvanised by the evolution of the *tributa comitia* and the tribunate, and yet it dragged on an existence, objectless and devoid of any true aim. The first proletariat which represented it was a disorganised ὄλη; and later ensued a poisoning of the ὄλη itself. The protoplasm of the state was, from an early date, utterly corrupted.

And yet the senate, which for the time controlled the magistrate, could not reach a real organisation and self-determination. While it prevented the upward evolution of *populus* and *plebs*, and made the nucleation of the organic life of the community in the magistracy an impossibility, it could not secure any permanent independent life for itself. It did not assimilate, and therefore necessarily degenerated, except when its environment called for a real self-assertion when<sup>2</sup> it gained renewed vitality. It was not a 'tactical' principle in government, and it failed to form a consistent πολιτεία. The magistrates, too, who might have formed the state, were long powerless, because of the

<sup>1</sup> Burke.

<sup>2</sup> On Doubleday's principle of population, which is in part a truism, if in part untrue.

disintegration, the non-unitary character of the magistracy as a centre of organisation. They could not disencumber themselves of the dead mass of popular tendencies, which they could nevertheless by no means assimilate; nor could they overcome the organised *imperium in imperio*—the senate which was their council.

The magistrates were undoubtedly the only formative element in the state, for only with the possibility of an effective democracy, primary or representative, could the *populus*, and of course the *plebs*, become more than *ἰλή*; and while lying between these two ideals—one its Eden, the other its Paradise—the *populus* was extinguished. And the senate was dumb and paralysed, except when it used other mouth-pieces and hands; it was in no sense formative.

And so when the *populus* became proletarian, and its hopeful elements died out with the growth of agrarian distress and usury and taxation and militarism, and when no 'Colbertism' could prevent that decay of the yeomanry which was the bane of antiquity, the senate attempting an organic creation failed; for it needed something more than its bastard animation to enable it to convert matter into life. And there was left only the magistrate. But there was schism in the magistracy, and a double or multiple organisation seemed probable. The partition of the true nucleus of imperial life was favoured by the senate, and as the senatorian activity decayed, a dismemberment of empire might have appeared feasible in which *senatus* or *populus* should acquire a true vitality as a centre of national organisation. Such a development however was checked by two influences,—the condition of the Mediterranean peoples external to Rome, and the fatal Roman conservatism.

The first of these, which resulted in the constant augmentation of the material elements of empire, by the accession of the devitalised components of the *anciens régimes* of Carthage and of Greece, might have seemed likely, taken with the constitutional primacy of the *populus* in Rome, to issue in the premature evolution of nationalities. But the reverse was in fact the case, for the Greek and Siceliot and African power of self-determination had worn itself out, and the demoralisation of the sovereign and subject-peoples could alike issue only in anarchy. A Viriathus must fall by assassination; a Sertorius could not maintain a Rome of the west. The Gallic peoples had no efficient organisation; the northern nations had scarcely arisen. No formation was possible. The *leges Salpensa et Maluginensis* were the first origins of a true nationalism, and they were not yet. Anarchy and its natural event in autocratic rule were the only possible issues.

And when a magistrate escaped the trammels of senatorian routine, he might conquer in east or west, but sooner or later he made his aim and object Rome. St. Peter's in mediaeval Rome was not more the focus of all roads and all pilgrimages than was the Capitol under the Commonwealth. Conservatism might yield to the superficial varnish of Greek culture and foster the serpent of Punic imperial policy, because Rome had no real culture and no real political genius, but it never gave way to any sentiment anti-Roman. It was perhaps

Chauvinism and Jingoism, and not patriotism, but it looked to the civic Rome as *ᾠφθαλός* of its world.

Anarchy, then, and a saturnalia of the dangerous classes were the natural issue of the breakdown of the senatorian machinery and of the economic system. The struggle of the orders ensued and a rush for the spoils, and the fittest survived, i. e. the people as strongest. But the people too were an element in the empire unfitted for government, and they succumbed to the arms of the organisers of the principate. The decline worked itself out, and ended in what *divus Augustus* chose to call the restoration of the commonwealth in B.C. 27, but which the historians term the Roman empire.

‘The old age of a polity is rarely venerable,’ and the decline of the Roman Republic is no exception to the rule. It is moreover a decline which begins with the Republic itself, and develops throughout its history. It is as a study of disease and decay therefore that Roman history, and especially Rome’s internal history, is scientifically valuable.

And scientific value in general implies artistic worthlessness. The fall of the empire lends itself to expression in a work of art, for it is the gathering of the nations round the dying lion. The fall of the empire can be presented in the likeness of a spectacle in the Coliseum. But the Republic’s decline is not picturesque, for it is a lingering death under internal disease; no eagles gather round it, for its physical strength is not burned out. It is the grim reality of some Hogarth’s picture representing in detail the horrors of a prolonged struggle, in isolation, against the grip of inward pain and tribulation. It is the death-agony, not in battle, but in the chamber, and it is therefore thoroughly revolting.

But as a study, not from the studio but from the mortuary, it is deeply and permanently interesting. It is the greatest example in history of a constitution balanced, not harmonised—a constitution doomed to perish because its unstable equilibrium will not allow of its assimilating the necessary nutriment of life. And it is the grand example of a state versed in the expedients of finance and commerce, but dying because it did not and could not know that economics to be real and wholesome must before all things consider men and their needs. And finally, it is remarkable as the first empire or universal dominion known to European history; and the result is discouraging. Rome verily in the freshness and purity of her early life had great possibilities; and the decline of her polity is the greatest political and moral failure that the world has yet seen. *Mole ruit sua.*











BLUNT. Decline of the Roman commonwealth.

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